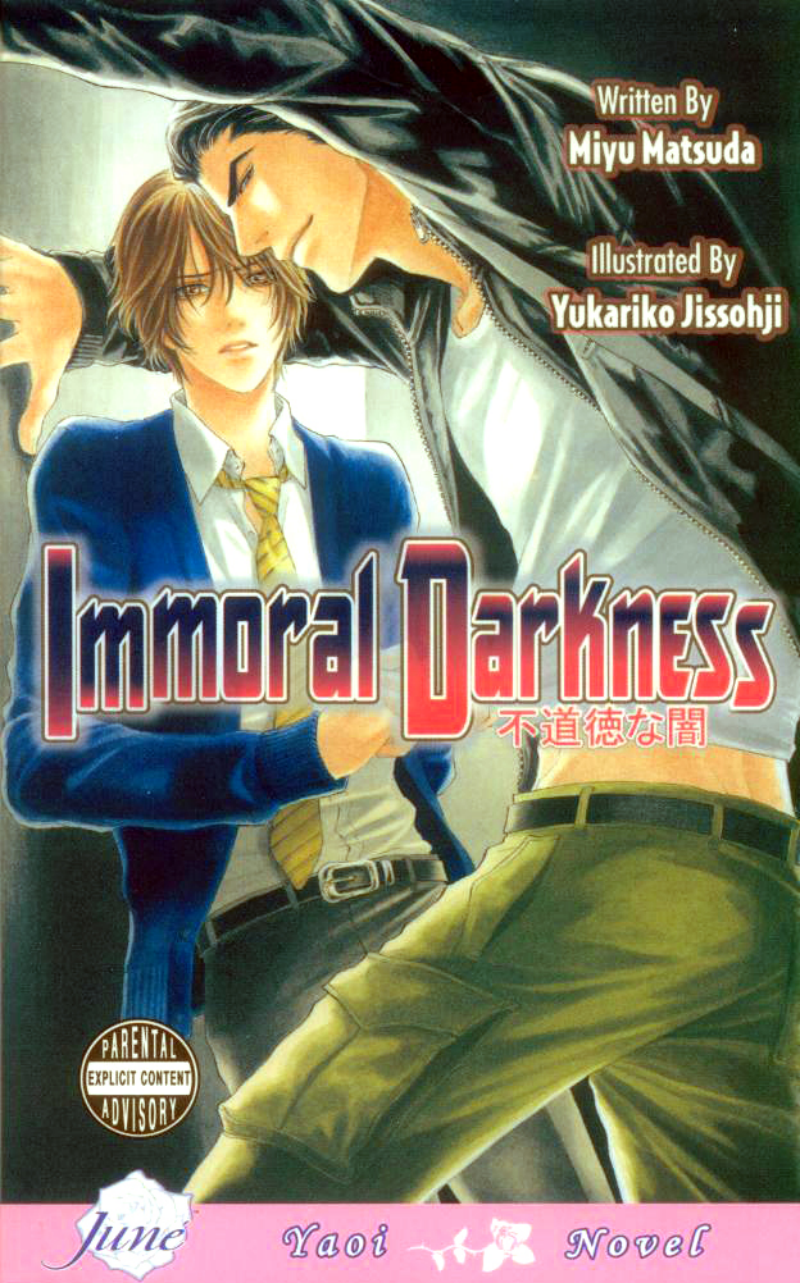




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Immoral Darkness

不道德な闇



June

Yaoi



Novel

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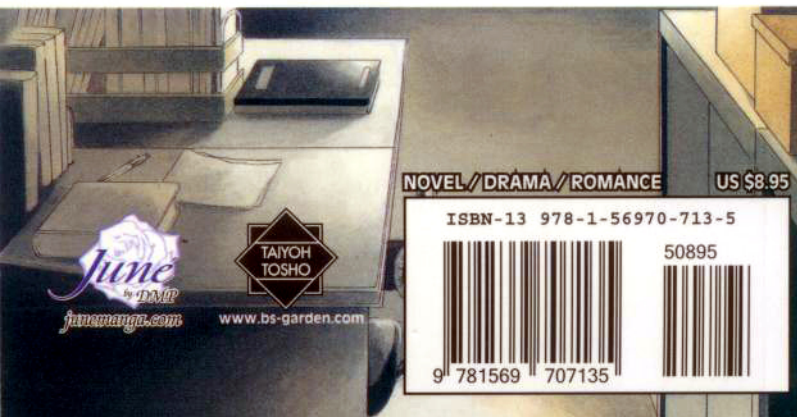
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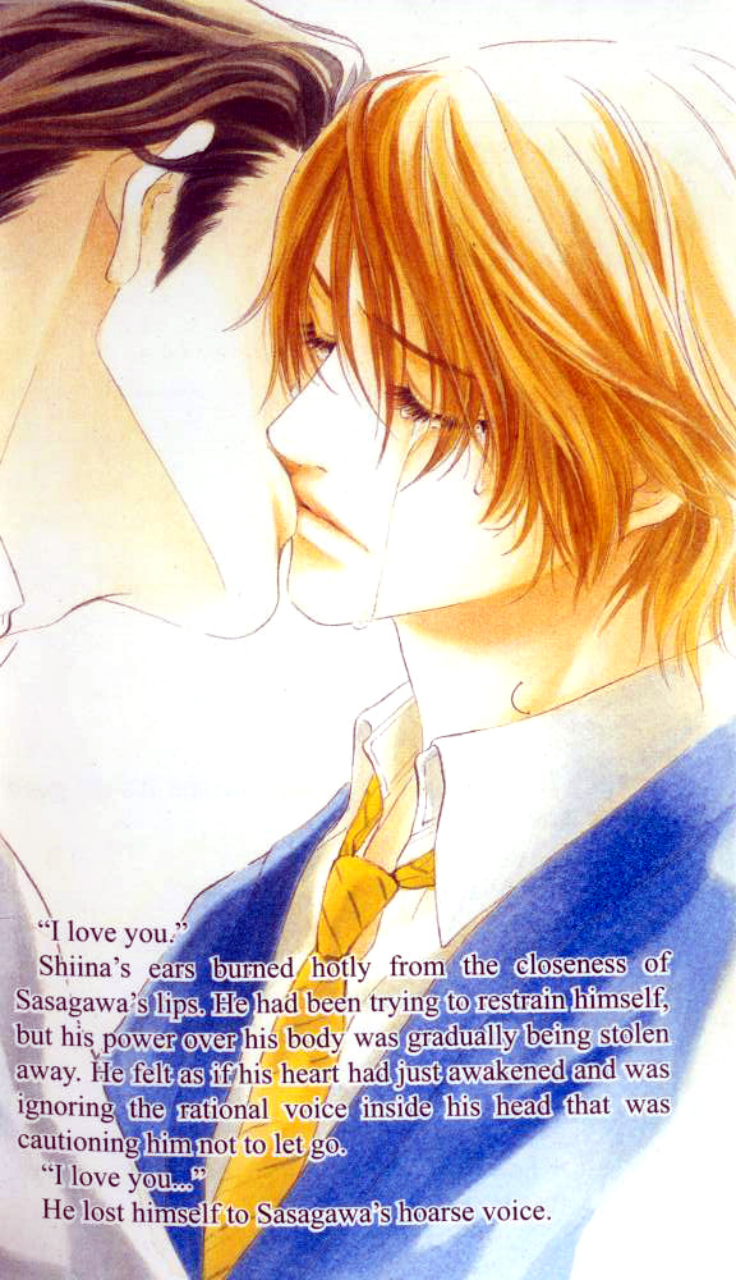
"Shiina." He bit his lip as the sound of that sweet voice reached his ears. He ignored it. Sasagawa's hot mouth pushed softly against the exposed flesh peeking out from the neck of Shiina's parka. "I can save you..." Sasagawa spoke as if he was his only solution.

Beautiful. Cool. Shiina Jun has always been admired by the women around him. But he would give up their admiration for just one ounce of affection from his family, or a chance at true love from *anyone* who could save him from the dark loneliness he's lived in for so long.

His teacher, Sasagawa Tetsuya, wants to be his savior. But is Sasagawa offering a way out, or pushing Shiina deeper into darkness? Can Shiina trust his heart to a man who forces himself on him?

Masterfully crafted by Miyu Matsuda, this story of a forbidden, passionate love between a student and his teacher is a definite must-read! Are the two willing to overcome all obstacles to get what they truly want in life?



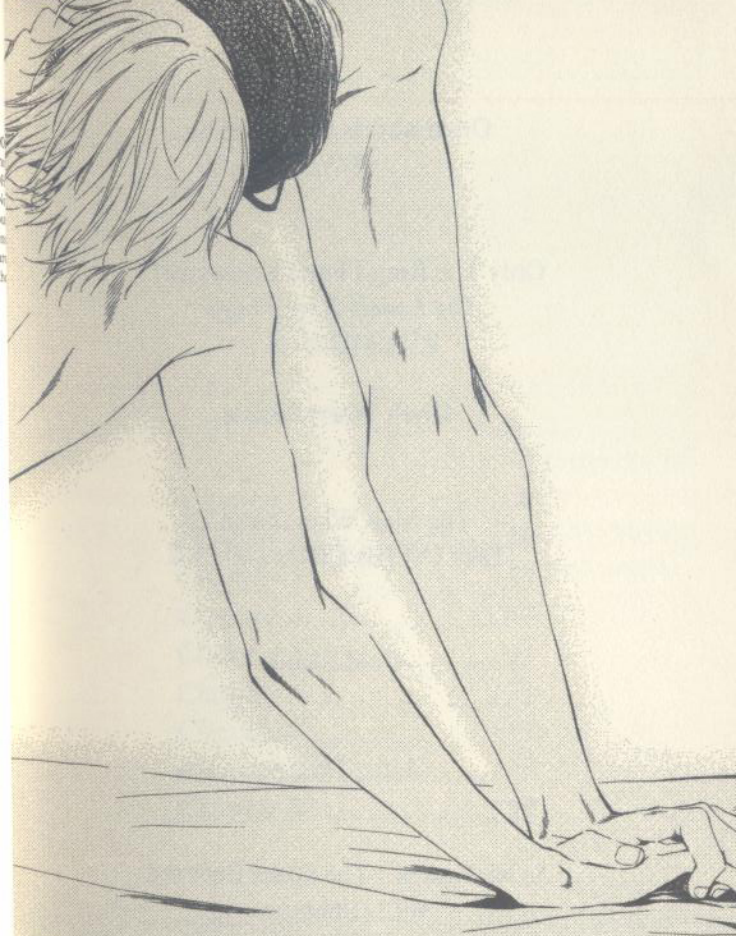


"I love you."

Shiina's ears burned hotly from the closeness of Sasagawa's lips. He had been trying to restrain himself, but his power over his body was gradually being stolen away. He felt as if his heart had just awakened and was ignoring the rational voice inside his head that was cautioning him not to let go.

"I love you..."

He lost himself to Sasagawa's hoarse voice.



Immoral Darkness

不道德な闇

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Chapter 1

In his room, he checked the reflection of his slim figure in the full-length mirror. His thin, ash-brown hair was slicked back with gel. The top two buttons of his white shirt were unbuttoned. His light yellow-and-black-striped tie was knotted loosely. A jacket seemed too formal, so he put on a comfortable cardigan instead. He slipped a belt through the loops of his gray pants. His socks were a sensible black.

After putting on his dark green glasses, the image of a regular high school boy was complete.

Facing himself in the mirror, Shiina took slow, deep breaths.

Everything would be all right. He looked just like he had yesterday.

To face his enemy, he had to look strong on the outside first. His black eyes sparkled from behind his glasses, which were purely for cosmetic purposes. His eyes projected both cleverness and sweetness. Shiina took a long, hard look at his reflection.

No matter what happened, he wouldn't flinch. He wouldn't shed a tear. He would go through with this. If he couldn't, the world would be nothing but darkness. His thin lips tightened as he mentally prepared himself



for the long, rough day ahead.

He would be 18 in one year. There were only a few more months left until he graduated from high school. Only a little while longer. Every rough night and day he survived meant that that moment was steadily getting closer. That was the thing that was cheering him on; it was his only hope besides the fact that he was still alive.

Leaving his room, he went downstairs. Entering the living room, he saw his brother, who was two years younger than him, sitting at the table eating breakfast in the adjacent dining room. Their father was facing the younger boy, his back to Shiina.

"Hayato. Eat your vegetables, too," their mother cautioned, standing by the sink as she took a break from washing dishes.

As Hayato poked his fork at the vegetables that remained in his salad bowl, a scowl spread across his pimply face.

"What?" he whined. "You know I don't like green things."

"You have to eat a balanced meal. Right. Papa?"

Hearing his wife's words, their father folded up the newspaper that had been spread out upon the table. "That's right. If you eat right and work hard, you'll grow up big and strong."

It was a morning scene that one could have seen anywhere. Only Shiina didn't fit into this scene.

How long had it been like this? How long had his family excluded him, the eldest son? They didn't

resemble each other at all. His younger brother was studious and loved baseball—he had a tan all year round. All of their parents' attention and love were directed towards Hayato. Not that Shiina had done something to make them dislike him. He was used to them neglecting him; his presence being ignored had become normal to him. Shiina was trapped in this box of a house, and was nothing more than a roommate to them. They were family, yet they weren't. His parents' blood ran through him, yet he was more unfamiliar to them than even a stranger was. For good or bad, he had a face that had inherited both his parents' good looks—something that had made him conceited, even though he was teased about it by everyone around him.

Self-pity was unforgivable. So, he never admitted to anyone how badly his family had treated him. As he put some coffee on, Shiina began to feel nauseated watching the picture-perfect family. Of course, his mother never fixed meals for him; she left it all up to Shiina. He had spoken up about it many times before, but she had never given any reaction. The only thing Shiina could do in these circumstances was just to try to get used to this abnormal environment as soon as possible. There was just a huge gap between him and his family. Only by accepting that fact could he protect himself.

Shiina even took out the trash himself. He heard his mother say once that the neighbors had praised her because of it. He had strained to hear how she had answered them, and his mother had proudly said, "Our house has a *laissez-faire* policy, so we've raised them to

be responsible for themselves." Hearing this, his whole body had stiffened with anger and his clenched fist had started to shake. Since then, he began to detest his thick-skinned mother from the bottom of his heart.

Shiina's given name was Jun, written with the character meaning "to return." His parents named him that in hopes that happiness would return to him again and again. However, they had not called him by that name in a very, very long time.

"Heeeey, Shiina-kun."

"...Nnmnn?"

Even though the girl's thin voice interrupted his nap, Shiina's consciousness was lured deeper and deeper into sleep.

"Math is next, you know! If Sasagawa catches you sleeping, he'll definitely call on you in class, so you better wake up soon!"

Finally stirred by the gentle tone of her voice, Shiina remembered that he was sitting in his seat in the classroom. The noise around him started to become clearer, dragging his drowsy mind back to reality.

"Ah...oh, thanks." He had put his head down on his crossed arms on top of his desk, and at some point, his glasses must have gotten crooked. Pushing the bridge up with his fingers, he thanked the girl.

She was sitting in the seat next to Shiina, and had apparently been staring at him. When their eyes met, she smiled, flustered.

"Uh...oh, no problem." She blushed slightly,

shaking her head. Her feminine, bashful smile was cute.

Shiina chuckled, a suave expression on his face. Maybe she was encouraged by that, because even though they hadn't really talked unless it was absolutely necessary, she began talking in an ecstatic voice.

"Sasagawa is so unfair, isn't he? He'll call on you even if you doze off for just a little bit. He woke me up before. Also, his white coat is *so* filthy, even from up close! I think he only wears it so he can wipe chalk dust on it."

"Oh, really?" he responded, feigning interest. He gave her a vague smile. Even though he had no reason for it, he took his cellphone from his pant's pocket and pretended to check something on it to avoid her. If he shut himself in his own world, no one could follow him. Shiina purposefully pushed people away, probably to make himself seem callous.

Ai was accustomed to Shiina's cold attitude. Not only did she not get mad at him for cutting off the conversation, she twisted herself around to face the girl in the seat behind her and babbled with excitement, "Did you see that? He laughed! He looks *sooo* hot up close!"

"No fair, Ai! You get to sit next to him!" a disapproving voice came from the seat behind Ai's.

After that, the boy sitting directly behind Shiina let out an irritated sigh. The boys in the class were always disgusted when the girls got this excited over him. It had always been that way. In elementary school, middle school and high school, the girls were always crazy about him, and he'd always get called aside and have girls confess their feelings for him. No matter

who it was, he had always turned them down, and a rumor had spread throughout school that he would not date anyone, but even still, every girl thought she was different and was determined to take on the challenge. It got so annoying that he stopped going when girls asked to meet him somewhere. Until eventually, the requests became less frequent.

He just wasn't interested in girls his own age, but even so, he wasn't deliberately trying to be cold. There were vicious rumors about him, and the jealous looks never went away. Shiina was alone everywhere—at school and at home.

"Oh, so you're *sooo* hot up close, huh?"

At that belittling tone of voice, Shiina looked up. A man was standing next to the podium, wearing a white coat that didn't look like it had ever been washed. It was the math teacher, Sasagawa.

Shiina's seat was second from the front, so it looked like Sasagawa had heard the conversation while walking into the classroom.

The teacher's sharp gaze was focused not on Ai, but on Shiina.

"I'm jealous. I wish someone would say that about me," he said.

Perhaps because he was annoyed that everyone was still noisy after the bell rang, Sasagawa's voice sounded strangely childish and, if one imagined he was being serious, sounded truly ridiculous.

"Why are you the only one smiling?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry." Shiina had let a smile slip.



Sasagawa gave him a sidelong glare. Shiina kept grinning, hiding his mouth with his hand.

Only nine years older than them, Sasagawa was wearing brown sandals that had gone out of style years ago. He took long strides and reached the podium, then opened the attendance book. He began to quickly call out the students' names in a low, annoyed tone of voice.

Shiina rested one cheek on his hand, and stared at the teacher out of the corner of his eye. Sasagawa was about 180 centimeters tall, and had a solid build.

He might be the one who looks hotter up close than me, Shiina thought.

Just as Ai had said, Sasagawa wore a white coat that was filthy all year round. He didn't have a very good reputation among the students. However, he wasn't bad looking. He had double eyelids, and his wet, glossy black hair was slicked back. It complimented his hard, well-shaped features. The bridge of his nose was unremarkable. The corners of his mouth were turned up, giving him an arrogant look. If he would take better care of himself, certainly the female students would flock to him.

Shiina realized he was throwing a look of pity at Sasagawa, which was most likely unwelcome. He smiled ruefully to himself.

He knew all too well how he didn't appreciate girls he didn't even like flirting with him. Sasagawa was probably the same, and didn't think of high school girls in a sexual way. Just like Shiina himself.

Realizing this, Shiina cast his eyes down sadly. Even if he could say the same thing about both of them,

their reasons would be completely different. He stretched out his arms and let out a long sigh. Turning around, he noticed that Ai's fervent gaze was once again focused on him. If he gave any sign that he acknowledged her gaze, the whole class would notice one by one. He was fed up with the persistence of his stalkers, but they might think he was conceited, so he hesitated.

He wondered how he looked in Sasagawa's cold eyes. As he copied down the formula off the blackboard, doubt began to grow inside him. He had thought that he and Sasagawa were of the same mind, but he realized that the teacher was probably completely indifferent to him. To Sasagawa, he was a quiet student who was difficult to deal with. That's probably what the teacher thought of Shiina.

Just the act of looking up made it seem like he felt guilty of something. But he still had to face forward. He let out a sigh. What had he been expecting, anyway? When you had expectations, you just got betrayed. A familiar feeling of disappointment began to rise to the surface of his mind. He never wanted to go through that pain again.

If you trusted yourself, you didn't need anyone else. You'd never get hurt. And if you made the wrong decision, the only one you could blame was yourself.

Therefore, he would never open up his heart to anyone.

He engraved those words deep inside of him, and once again assumed his cold expression. His gaze met Sasagawa's, but he wasn't sure how long his teacher had been looking at him. He felt an insurmountable

distance between him and that piercing gaze.

Finally, with a nervous expression on his face, Shiina turned his eyes away.

Chapter 2

At the train station, a light rain was falling. It was around 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Shiina sat on a bench by himself, absentmindedly watching the people come and go.

He shut out the noises of the outside world around him with the loud music coming from his headphones. When he did this, it seemed like everything in the world around him was fake. The music traveling to his ears served as background music as he gazed at the passersby in front of him. What he was seeing was all really happening, yet something about it seemed strangely unreal.

There were many people who lived in that unreal existence. But on this side of the "real world," Shiina was alone.

He wondered if that was why, even though he thought he was used to being alone, sometimes he still craved the warmth of others.

A car turned around in the circle of traffic, and its horn gave a short *beep beep*! Looking up, he saw a Mercedes Benz pulling up to the station. The light from the headlights blinded him as it turned towards him, illuminating the raindrops.

"Jun-kun!"

Halfway rolling down the driver's side window, a beautiful woman motioned for him to get inside the car. Her hands gripped the wheel, and he could see that her fingernails were painted an elegant pink to match her suit. On one of her thin fingers was a heavy-looking diamond ring, while a Franck Muller watch glittered on her slender wrist. She looked very feminine, from the perfume she wore to the way she put on her makeup.

"Sorry. Were you waiting long?"

The woman turned to face Shiina, who went to sit in the passenger seat, speaking gently as if to see what kind of mood he was in. The seats were softer than those of a domestic car, and he sank deeper in them, enjoying the luxury.

Shiina smiled. "No, not really," he answered.

Ever since he was little, he was teased for being a pretty boy, but when he actually smiled, he was a knockout. Just as he expected, the woman held her breath, and gazed at him with a mesmerized look on her face. A group of lights reflected in the side mirror. The cars following behind them had gathered up.

Shiina urged with a deliberately gentle voice. "Kanako-san, let's go."

"Oh, you're right. I'm sorry." Kanako quickly turned the steering wheel, and pulled back into the traffic lane. "Just as I was about to leave, I got a call from my husband. I panicked, wondering what I'd do if he said he was coming home already," she said in a sulky voice as she looked out of the front windshield.

Shiina leaned his elbow against the passenger

side window, and without looking at her, asked, "So what happened?"

"Oh, he just called to tell me he wouldn't be home till after midnight again. He's been really busy lately I guess. It's always like this."

"What about your daughters? Are they okay alone?"

"It's okay, they're both at cram school. My oldest is about to take her high school entrance exam, and my husband is insisting that she go to a private school, so she's been studying like mad everyday. I can't even bear to watch it anymore." Kanako glanced at him, a look begging for sympathy in her eyes.

He wondered how she could complain about her husband's actions when she herself was betraying him in the worst way by having an affair. Shiina looked at her disdainfully, but she didn't seem to notice. What a shameless woman. Maybe that's why she was so perfect for him. He smiled slightly and shifted his gaze back to outside the window.

Caught up at a red light, the car stopped at an intersection. From both sides, the cars passing by them made loud splashing noises as their tires made contact with the rainwater that covered the ground. They waited for the light to change. Shiina was entranced by the sound of the rain, but Kanako broke the silence as she parted her bright red lips and said, "Hey, Jun-kun. I know you're busy with school and your job, but do you think you could make a little more time for me?"

"Hmm...I'll think about it."

Actually, he had gotten fired from his part-time

job and hadn't found another one yet, but it was too much of a pain to tell her that. He looked at her profile and could tell that she understood perfectly that he had no intention of doing so.

Yet she continued desperately. "Even if you worked everyday, it's only for a few hours, right? If you're not making much money, I could pay you however much you want."

"What?! No way. If you do that, it'd be like you were my sugar mama or something." Shiina laughed like a little boy, showing his teeth.

Seemingly relieved that his gaze had turned back to her, Kanako said in a flirty voice, "Why, isn't that what I already am?" Her slender hand crept over to rest on top of Shiina's thigh. With her pink nails glittering, she put her hand inside his jeans.

"Aren't we being a bit hasty, Kanako-san?" He gave her a sidelong glance, an impish smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"But I've wanted it for so long. Just let me touch it until we get to the hotel." Contrary to her sweet tone of voice, she moved her hands in a pushy, obscene way.

"Until we get to the hotel? Like you'll stop once we get there..." Shiina said, with a teasing expression on his face. Kanako giggled coquettishly.

Three hours later, Shiina stood alone, watching as the Mercedes departed, heading towards the center of town. He noticed Kanako repeatedly glancing in her rearview mirror, probably checking to see if he was still

there. He couldn't relax until Kanako's car disappeared from his sight. It wasn't because he was worried about her, but because being watched like that made him feel uneasy.

Along with the other cars that were coming and going, his view of the Mercedes was soon obstructed by a building. He made a sour face, and wiped off her bright red lipstick with the back of his hand.

Damn, that woman is persistent in every way possible, he thought bitterly, then turned around.

Even after taking a shower, the sensation of her arms and legs coiling around him like a snake just wouldn't go away. He didn't know if it was because her husband didn't pay attention to her, or if it was just out of pure lust, but Kanako used him to relieve her stress whenever she pleased. But to Shiina, it was more of an annoyance than anything else.

He headed towards the train station and checked the train departure times with an unpleasant look still on his face. There were high school students sitting on the benches in front of the small shops and kiosks, some of them wearing school uniforms, some not. Some carried sports bags—they were probably on their way home from club activities. Some of them seemed to be couples. Of course, there were also tired-looking businessmen and elderly people there as well, but their presence were overwhelmed by the loud teenagers that surrounded them.

This wasn't a main railroad line, but it was near some especially prestigious schools, so it was mainly used by students who immersed themselves in

their studies and weren't particularly strong-looking. The station was infamous for these types of students being forced to give up their money by the "hyenas" that appeared after school. The "hyenas" were mainly delinquent students from nearby technical high schools, "idiot schools," or well-known private high schools. Those guys didn't have the nerdy students to steal from; they'd probably steal from anyone, so the adults usually ignored their behavior.

Shiina checked the train schedule, while watching a guy who was clearly a hyena from the corner of his eye.

"What should I do now..." he mumbled to himself, supporting his aching back with one hand. Thanks to Kanako-san, his wallet, which was stuffed in his back pocket, was now much thicker.

There was a half-hour until the next train came. His house was only two train stations away.

It might be faster to just walk home, he thought. Plus the benches are packed with hyenas. It was hard to ask for help, because the hyenas almost always aimed for people who were alone. The probability that I might be their victim today looks pretty high...

After a little bit of worrying, Shiina flopped down on a bench in a waiting room with the most people he could find. He had confidence in his physical strength, but since he'd just done it twice with Kanako-san, he probably wouldn't last long in a fight. All he wanted was to rest a little.

He gave a laborious sigh. His gaze stopped on an arrogant-looking man who was squatting with

his back against the wall. The man's baseball cap was pulled down low over one eye, and he wore a black short-sleeved shirt layered over a long-sleeved one. A belt buckle shone from the waist of his camouflage pants, and he wore Timberland boots. There was an aura of danger that seemed to drift from his scowling eyes. The girls waiting for the train were also aware of the guy's presence.

Suddenly, his eyes met Shiina's. Shiina's heart pounded.

He silently pleaded for the man to look somewhere else, but the guy showed no signs of looking away. He kept staring at Shiina, as if boring a hole in him. As if he was playing a game with Shiina.

At this point, Shiina almost felt annoyed that he had to be the one to avert his eyes, so he stared back just as intensely. Even though they were complete strangers, he felt oddly close to the man.

At that moment, he felt a friendly tap on his shoulder from behind.

"Hey, dude..."

Shiina turned towards the direction of the voice. A boy with dyed blond hair stood by his right shoulder, sneering at him.

A hyena. Shiina raised his eyebrows in annoyance.

A black-haired boy quickly stood in front of him. A few more guys sat down on the bench on his left side, so now there was no way Shiina could escape.

"Can you lend us some money? That pachinko parlor over there cleaned us out. We don't have enough

to ride the trains. Our houses are really far away, so we screwed..." the blond boy said, showing his crooked teeth. He brought his face close to Shiina's. Apparently this was a strategy to try to make him more afraid.

"Hmm...why don't you go ask the policeman in the booth outside the station? He'll probably lend you some," Shiina said carelessly, keeping his eyes on the boy. Of course, they'd only agree to that suggestion if they were honestly out of money.

Shiina was sure his sarcasm got through to them. The two boys' expressions changed at Shiina's contemptuous gaze. Their lips tightened and a violent look sparkled in their eyes. They exchanged glances, and one of them said with an evil look on his face, "We don't really get along with the cops. How 'bout you come with us and do the asking?"

Shiina glanced at them.

Like they're really going to go to the police? They're probably just gonna take me somewhere deserted and steal my wallet. He nonchalantly sized the two of them up. They were at least five centimeters taller than his height of 170. But under their baggy clothes they probably weren't too muscular. He didn't know if it was because of the effects of smoking too much or doing too many drugs, but their faces were sickly and pale.

I can't think of any reason why I can't take them. I could beat these guys.

He made up his mind and stared at them intensely, slowly standing up from the bench. The blond boy sneered and said, "Thanks, dude."

They grabbed Shiina by both arms and started to

lead him out of the station. The people around him gazed at him sympathetically, but none of them made a move to help him. Most of them only glanced at him quickly, being sure not to make eye contact. In order to make them feel even guiltier, Shiina looked down meekly, playing the victim role perfectly.

Exiting the train station, the boys didn't head towards the direction of the police booth, but towards the bicycle rack. Just as Shiina had thought, they were going to try to threaten him with violence to get his money.

"Hey, isn't the police booth that way, guys?" he questioned, even though he knew what their intentions were. His voice shook as he tried to suppress laughter, and the boys clearly took that as a sign of fear.

One of them spoke and said in a kind voice, "It's too much trouble to go all the way there. If you can give us some money, we'll be fine. We're good guys, so if you hand over the money nicely, we won't kick your ass. Okay?"

The black haired boy nodded enthusiastically at the blond boy's suggestion.

So, the blond one's the leader, and the black-haired one's his minion, huh? No matter how many times you add weak plus weak, it'll never equal strong...

Shiina had sized them up correctly, but he played along so they wouldn't catch on.

"C'mon, hand over your wallet," the black-haired boy demanded arrogantly, even though he wouldn't dare do anything. He stretched out his hand, a hand that probably had never known hardship, but had

been spoiled rotten.

Shiina inhaled quietly, planted his feet on the ground and clenched his fists.

"Hey, get outta the way!" a low, arrogant voice called suddenly.

I've heard that voice somewhere before...

Shiina turned around to see who had intervened. In front of him stood the strong, wild-looking guy he'd seen in the waiting room. A girl, who was wearing a school uniform and appeared to be in junior high, followed behind the guy. She had a nervous expression on her face.

Irritated by this interruption, the blond boy clicked his tongue. "We're busy. Get lost."

The man glared at him harshly. "I *said*, you bastards are in the way! I'm trying to get a bike. If you're gonna mug someone, do it somewhere else," he said in a calm yet menacing voice. He took one step forward and shoved the boy's shoulder.

The blond boy staggered and fell. He stretched his hands up exaggeratingly, and his tangled legs finally managed to stand up again. He had nearly fallen into the line of bicycles, and he was so clumsy that Shiina couldn't help laughing. He turned and covered his mouth with his hands, but it was too late. The blond boy had seen him. The boy turned in a circle, looking around him, only to see his friend also biting his lips to hold back laughter. The shame of this was too much for the wannabe punk to bear, and he turned bright red.

"You bastard! You wanna fight?" he shrieked accusingly, and grabbed the man's collar.

"No, I don't wanna fight. It'd be too easy," the man said with a cruel expression on his face.

"What did you say, you son of a bitch?" The second the boy brought his face closer, the man head-butted him, and a short moan escaped from the boy's mouth. He held his head, leaving his body wide open. The man kicked him violently in the stomach. The boy fell to his knees, and the bicycles on either side of him fell like dominoes, emitting a sequence of loud crashes.

The boy's hand groped for something to hold onto to help him stand, but the man stomped on it with an indifferent expression on his face. The bicycles were spread out in a heap below him, and one of the boy's hands was caught in between the spokes of a wheel. It was painful to even look at him. Shiina turned his face away as he heard the girl let out a high-pitched scream; apparently she had seen the same thing.

Such a young girl shouldn't be seeing something like this.

Just as Shiina thought this, he realized the man, who was much older than him, was still beating up the kid. The sound of him kicking the boy mixed with muffled sobs.

Bewildered, the black-haired boy took off at full speed towards the main road. He had sucked up to his friend so much, yet when it mattered, he was useless.

This is why I don't trust people, Shiina thought as he watched coldly as the boy ran off.

"Sorry they fell down. Which one's yours?" the man asked the girl. Seizing this chance, the blond boy tried to stagger off. Sensing this, the man began to open

his mouth threateningly.

Shiina quickly grabbed his arm. "Let him go."

They briefly made eye contact, but then he turned his gaze away.

I'm positive I know this guy...

Even though he was certain of that, not being able to think of who the man was made him feel sick. He thought of everyone he knew who had the same kind of features as this man. Finally, everything added up, and Shiina opened his eyes wide with surprise. The man stared at him, and lifted up the corners of his mouth and smiled. "*So you finally realized?*" his expression seemed to say.

"Which bike is yours?" he repeated to the girl who looked like she was frozen in place.

"Umm...uhhh...the one in front of you, that red bicycle. That's mine."

The man pulled the bicycle from the pile and gave it to her, and the girl thanked him earnestly over and over again.

Shiina and the boys had been blocking the bike rack, so she had probably asked him to help her. And unfortunately, that man had turned out to be a worse person than the delinquents she was trying to avoid. She looked so pitiful. Her eyes were full of fear, and didn't meet the gaze of the man. It seemed like she couldn't tell him she wanted to go home. Playing it smart, Shiina said to her in a comforting voice, "I'm sorry, you couldn't get to your bike because I was in the way, huh? Since you had to wait, you'll probably be a little late. Be careful on your way home, okay?"

At his kind, reassuring smile, the girl timidly looked at Shiina and nodded. Then, she got on her bike and pedaled off. Shiina watched her as she left, and from beside him, the man crouched on top of the concrete.

Suspicious at what he might do next, Shiina looked down. The man pulled out a box of cigarettes from his front shirt pocket. "You look better without glasses, Shiina," he said in a low voice, holding a cigarette in his mouth and then lighting it. Shiina clearly saw that his knuckles were flat.

"Sensei. What are you doing here?" Shiina demanded in a rude tone of voice.

Sasagawa stared back at him with a bored look on his face. "Oh. I'm trying to prevent crime. All the male teachers are taking turns at the station. I didn't wanna do it, but if I don't show up, the station people will tell the principal, so I have to come."

His face was hidden under the shadow of the brim of his hat, so Shiina couldn't see his expression.

"Sensei, what happened to your hand?"

"Youthful indiscretion. Ridiculous, huh?" Sasagawa didn't say anything else, so Shiina decided not to press him further.

Shiina had gotten into plenty of fights with guys who had been jealous of him, but had never had to defend himself to that extent. He had wanted to take karate or some other kind of martial arts classes, but his family didn't want to hear about his accomplishments or aspirations, so he had had no choice but to ask a group of neighborhood delinquents whom he had been childhood friends with.

Maybe it was because they were two years older than him, but they were more than willing to teach him all kinds of techniques. One of those delinquents had flat knuckles just like Sasagawa. He knew that they only got like that from getting into fist-fights a lot, or board-breaking from martial arts.

In other words, Sasagawa had once been like those boys. Standing still with his arms crossed, Shiina looked down. Sasagawa seemed to have a rough air about him.

So that's why he could stand up to the hyenas calmly like that. To him, beating that kid was like taking candy from a baby.

Sensing eyes on him, Sasagawa met Shiina's gaze. Their similarity seemed to grow as they spent time together without other students around. In the classroom, his gaze had always seemed cold, but now it was somehow kind.

"You seem completely different from how you are at school, so I was surprised," Shiina commented.

At this, a sullen expression spread across Sasagawa's face.

Even though Shiina had a lot of pride, he was also a bit cowardly in that he acted coldly so others wouldn't approach him. He did that to avoid getting hurt. But Sasagawa was different from timid Shiina, and was probably strong inside and out. Wildness and danger seemed to emanate from Sasagawa, creating a definitive negative aura about him. He probably wore that filthy coat and kept the students at a distance to erase that, and to hide his true self. Shiina began to develop a strong

interest in his mysterious teacher. Perhaps Sasagawa was even more like himself.

A feeling of hope began to slowly well up inside him. Shaking off his steady gaze, Sasagawa stood up. He threw his cigarette onto the asphalt, and crushed it with the heel of his boot. Shiina watched silently, unable to take his eyes off Sasagawa. He didn't realize Sasagawa was staring back at him until their eyes met again.

Sometimes they would make eye contact in class, but tonight it seemed as if they were so close, he couldn't stand it. Sasagawa thrust his large hand forward, with a cool look on his face. Not understanding, Shiina stared at it. Sasagawa made a beckoning gesture with his fingertips, as if to say, "Hurry up!" It seemed he wanted something. Shiina tilted his head.

"What?" he asked.

"You haven't thanked me yet for taking care of those guys," Sasagawa said with a straight face.

Shiina was speechless. Sasagawa had certainly helped him, but he was confident that he still would have been fine if Sasagawa hadn't intervened. But even if he said so, at this point, it would just sound like he was making up excuses.

"I don't have any money. Are you crazy?" Shiina spat, scowling. Of course, he had no intention of giving any kind of reward. However, Sasagawa nimbly plucked the wallet from Shiina's back pocket and pulled out a 10,000 yen bill. "Are you seriously a teacher?" Shiina asked doubtfully as he took the wallet back.

"How about you? Are you seriously in high school? What high school student carries around that

much money?" Sasagawa knitted his brows, smiling with one eye closed.

Shiina's wallet had been stuffed with the money Kanako had given him for sex. Without saying a word, Sasagawa had realized it was dirty money. Shiina realized there was a chance Sasagawa could ask him where he got it.

However, Sasagawa silently folded up the money and put it in his front pocket. Shiina could tell that he was 100% serious; there wasn't an ounce of a joke in his actions. While he watched with an amazed look on his face, Sasagawa suddenly changed the subject. "Oh, yeah. Are you getting on the next train?"

"Uh...yeah," Shiina answered quietly, and looked behind him. He didn't see any passengers lined up on the platform. It seemed there was still more time left. He looked forward again. This time, Sasagawa's eyes were squinted, and he followed the man's gaze.

"Which way?" Sasagawa prompted.

"South," Shiina answered.

Sasagawa shifted his gaze from the platform back to Shiina. Maybe it was because he didn't blink much, but Sasagawa's eyes had the power to silence people. When he stared at him like this, Shiina felt like he was some kind of game being hunted. He began to feel trapped, and the atmosphere became stifling.

Trying to bear the strange atmosphere, Shiina looked down. He could still feel Sasagawa's piercing eyes on him.

"Shiina. Will you keep me company until the train comes?" At this suggestion of killing time, even

though Sasagawa's voice was low, something about it was also gentle.

Shiina lifted his chin, and looked up from between the bangs of his brown hair. "Isn't that what I'm doing?"

"No, I mean *really* keep me company."

Shiina had no idea what Sasagawa meant by this, or what his intentions were. He tilted his head, and stared at Sasagawa silently. He felt overpowered by Sasagawa's steady gaze, and felt himself stop blinking frequently as well. Even though he recognized Sasagawa's face, the man definitely didn't feel like his teacher. Because they hadn't spent much time together, he didn't know much about Sasagawa's personality. He didn't know what the man was thinking, and that made him feel uneasy. He didn't know what to do, which made it even harder to look away from Sasagawa's gaze.

He was concentrating too hard, and didn't realize that he had been captured by Sasagawa.

"I'm sick of waiting around for hyenas," said Sasagawa. "It's boring. Also, you're a lot better than those dirty guys from before. So will you kill some time with me until the next train comes?"

"I guess so...but what do you want me to do?" he asked the tall Sasagawa.

"It's a secret," the teacher answered with a smirk on his face.

"This is stupid," Shiina spat coldly.

Sasagawa had been so persistent that Shiina had said yes, but apparently, the man was just making fun of him. Shiina quickly turned around and started heading

towards the station. Ignoring the voice calling out to him, he pushed on toward the silence.

"Wait!" Sasagawa called, his voice mixed with laughter.

When Shiina still didn't turn around, Sasagawa grabbed his arm and forced him to turn around.

"You're stubborn, aren't you? What?" Shiina asked boredly, glaring at Sasagawa.

"If you keep me company, I won't call on you in class for a week. How about that?" Sasagawa was trying to bargain with Shiina, but his calm voice and sharp eyes seemed serious.

Why is he being so persistent? What does he want me to do?

Even though Sasagawa wouldn't tell him, Shiina felt a little uneasy, but he was persuaded a little by Sasagawa's offer. He thought it over for a little bit, and then stated his terms. "Add that it's okay if I sleep during class. Then it's a deal."

Getting Shiina's consent, Sasagawa grinned, and Shiina stared forward.

Leaving the bike rack, they entered the train station grounds. Since Sasagawa had driven them out, it didn't look like there were any more hyenas around. All the remaining passengers had equally calm expressions on their faces. In the midst of the noise around them, Shiina followed where Sasagawa was leading him to.

Sasagawa took off his cap and stuck it into the pocket of his camouflage pants, and opened the door to a men's bathroom in a secluded part of the train station grounds. "Go inside," he ordered in an arrogant voice.

Shiina stood by the side of the door, glanced at Sasagawa and then went inside. He only used this train station on the way back from seeing Kanako, so he had never been in this bathroom. Graffiti on the wall caught his eye. There was trash and magazines scattered about. As he looked at his surroundings, Sasagawa suddenly grabbed his shoulder. Shiina didn't even have time to be surprised. He hit the graffiti-ridden wall hard.

"Nngh!" Pain raced through his back, and a sound escaped from the back of his throat. It was the same kind of sound the hyena boy had made as Sasagawa hurt him. He looked up and saw Sasagawa's threatening eyes, and couldn't look away. To the right were two toilet stalls, on the left were two urinals in a row, in front of them was a locker apparently used for cleaning supplies. The space was so narrow there was no place to run.

Sasagawa had effectively pinned his prey against the wall. "In class, you always look at me...don't you, Shiina? Do you like me that much?" he whispered gently into Shiina's ear.

Because they weren't that different in height, their faces were very close to each other. A lewd smile spread across Sasagawa's face. His long fingers touched Shiina's earlobe. Then, they traveled slowly, provocatively, down to the nape of his neck. He played with Shiina's soft hair. Shiina's face tightened at the unfamiliar touch of another man. He didn't want to let Sasagawa see his confusion, so he tried to remain expressionless, but he couldn't keep it up in this strange situation. Sasagawa maintained his strong glare, and

Shiina's clenched fists became damp with sweat. He couldn't move his legs, which stood firmly on the tiled floor.

Shiina gulped at the look of lust in Sasagawa's eyes. He finally got it. He had always thought Sasagawa showed little interest in the female students. But he never would have thought he would become the target of Sasagawa's affections.

He had always looked at Sasagawa with curiosity, but perhaps the man had misunderstood the meaning behind it. But even if he did have feelings for Sasagawa, as a teacher Sasagawa should scold and refuse Shiina. But this kind of teasing and bullying was the worst form of treatment. He disliked that perverse behavior. It was detestable. Shiina looked at Sasagawa with disgust.

"Aren't *you* the one who likes me? The only reason I look at you in class is to listen to you explain problems. There're no other feelings behind it. Only girls make me hard, I'm a regular guy. If you still have these feelings, maybe you should get checked out at the hospital," he said coldly.

Even though Shiina went this far, Sasagawa didn't seem to be mad. He actually smiled and said, "Hearing rude words like that come out of such a pretty mouth can't piss me off."

It didn't seem like Sasagawa would let up. It didn't seem like anything Shiina said would make a difference now. Shiina screwed up his face. All he could do was be amazed at Sasagawa's over-confidence.

Sasagawa still held him by both shoulders. He

brought his body closer to Shiina's. Chills raced through Shiina's body, and just as he opened his mouth to protest, Sasagawa stole a kiss from him.

"Mmmnnph!"

Shiina closed his eyes reflexively. Sasagawa kissed him forcibly, greedily. Shiina desperately tried to turn his face away, but Sasagawa followed him just as persistently. Shiina wheezed, trying to breathe, and Sasagawa quickly thrust his tongue in Shiina's mouth, as if he had been waiting for that moment.

As Shiina's head was pinned against the wall, he couldn't raise it. He tried to tilt his face down to get away, but Sasagawa grabbed his chin.

He had no idea being violated by someone was so painful. He felt an oppressive feeling of disgust well up in the pit of his stomach. Even though his stomach was empty, he felt so sick he thought he would vomit. Even though Sasagawa saw how pale Shiina's face had become, he showed no signs of letting up. But, he softened his expression and continued to enjoy the kiss.

Of course, Shiina didn't dare criticize him. Anyway, he couldn't escape the situation, nor could he breathe. He tried to push away with his hands. He even tried to kick Sasagawa's shins. But the tight grip on both of his shoulders didn't let up. When he moved, Sasagawa would move, too, and when he didn't move, Sasagawa's body pressed closer to his.

With a vacant look in his eyes, Shiina turned towards Sasagawa. He was exhausted from having sex with Kanako, so no matter how many times he tried to get away, he failed. No matter how much he complained,

he would be quieted. There was nothing he could do.

After Sasagawa had explored every bit of Shiina's mouth with his tongue, he finally took his lips away. Seeing Shiina's silent expression, Sasagawa laughed lightly.

Hatred took hold of Shiina at this calm and composed attitude. Looking away, he saw the silhouette of someone beyond the frosted glass of the bathroom door. The person seemed to be talking to someone nearby, he could hear their hushed voices. It was a man with a stout build wearing a blazer and a hat.

A train station employee.

Shiina took a deep breath, clinging to the bit of light that suddenly came into the dark room.

"Keep quiet." Sasagawa's large hand covered his mouth.

Shifting his gaze from the bathroom door, Shiina glared at him with resentment.

Sasagawa grabbed his chin and stared down at Shiina. "If you're a man, you keep your promises, right? Even if you're a student, I won't forgive someone who doesn't keep his promise."

At the threat of violence, Shiina felt utter despair. Sasagawa had incessantly beaten the boy from before, and he might do the same to Shiina. Before long, the person's silhouette vanished from his field of vision. Closing his eyes, Shiina let out a heavy sigh into Sasagawa's palm. He had to do something in order to survive.

Sasagawa slowly removed his hand from Shiina's mouth. He glared sharply at him as if to warn

him, and then checked his watch. "There's still 10 minutes before the southbound train comes. I'll finish before it reaches the platform."

"So you're telling me to bear with it until then?" Shiina asked quietly, yet angrily.

What a selfish man.

Sasagawa said nonchalantly, "It doesn't matter what you think. As long as you let me touch you however I want, I'll be satisfied."

Shiina was rendered speechless at this greedy, forceful declaration. His face stiffened, taken aback. He couldn't be polite any longer. He had had enough.

"Are you frickin' kidding me? How many times do I have to tell you, I'm not interested in a perverted teacher like you. Let me go!" he said, raising his voice. His legs were the only parts of his body that remained free, and he kicked Sasagawa's thighs and shins recklessly.

"You're not very obedient, are you?" Sasagawa's eyes were seething with anger.

Shiina couldn't help but flinch at the sudden change in Sasagawa's expression. He couldn't compare the man to a hyena. He was a seriously dangerous man.

"If you don't stop, I'll tell the principal and the school board," Shiina threatened, trying to hide his fear. If Sasagawa was going this far, Shiina wouldn't hold back either. He had to make him see that.

Hearing this, Sasagawa raised the corner of his mouth as if he had just heard something ridiculous. He replied in a low voice, "Go ahead. But do you have the courage to say, 'I was the victim of a perverted teacher'?"

Do you want people to look at you like that? You'll become even more alone. Well, I guess you've always liked being alone, so maybe you won't mind?"

He had taken off the cool and collected mask he usually wore, and the words he spoke now were too cruel. He had grabbed hold of Shiina's deepest weakness.

Shiina became pale. He quietly continued to stare at Sasagawa, not because he wanted to, but because he couldn't stop. Pinned between Sasagawa and the wall, his brain had forgotten how to move his body.

"Do you know, Shiina? A loner is excluded from the group, and he has no choice but to live by himself, in loneliness. A miserable existence. There's nothing cool about it. That sounds exactly like you, doesn't it?" Sasagawa said coldly and sarcastically.

"Why do you have to say things like that?" Shiina's dry, strained voice confirmed what Sasagawa had been guessing.

"You're so stupid," Sasagawa scoffed. "Do you think I haven't noticed? You're too pretty for your own good. That's why you stand out so much. That's why you rarely talk to other students. That's why you distance yourself during breaks. That's why you're always alone. But the type of people who do that on purpose, who want to do that, who do it because they want to walk their own path don't look as lonely as you do when you're alone. Am I wrong?"

Shiina couldn't reply. Then what kind of look did he have in his eyes now? Did Sasagawa think he could understand someone like Shiina, who was

embarrassed and pitiful and on the verge of tears? Sasagawa's harsh words echoed in his head, and Shiina couldn't bring himself to speak. He covered his face. Even if he was ridiculed for using this escape, it was better than Sasagawa guessing what else he felt. He bit his lips, and tried to endure this.

"Don't just stand there, say something." Sasagawa grabbed his chin, forcing Shiina to look at him. This allowed Sasagawa to look deeply into Shiina's eyes.

This tense, narrow space. Shiina clenched his fist tightly. He tried to regain his composure, rubbing his sweaty fingers together. Someone as good-looking as Sasagawa could have anyone he wanted, so why would he have to go through all the trouble to bully a student outside of class? Shiina didn't understand, and that scared him. He was so scared that the tears that were about to seep out were only held back by his eyelashes, therefore he was afraid to even blink.

Sasagawa stared at Shiina's wet eyes, but didn't tease him. "If you stay quiet, I'll be gentle."

Shiina pretended to consider this, and then Sasagawa's lips met his.

"...Mmmph."

Sasagawa pushed his way through the front of Shiina's soft black parka, and crept up the bottom of his grey T-shirt. Shiina shivered and got goosebumps at the feeling of Sasagawa's hands on him. He was upset that his heart had been exposed, but now his body would be, too? Sasagawa's wet tongue invaded his mouth once again. Shiina's resistance turned to apathy, and his

disappointment turned to despair. The pressure he felt in his chest got heavier and heavier. Sasagawa's lips strayed to his jaw, then to his neck. Shiina's partly closed eyelids began to tremble.

"...Nhmf."

Sasagawa pulled Shiina's shirt up to his collarbone, exposing his chest. He began to lick him with a slippery tongue. Shiina couldn't bear this feeling of discomfort any longer so he closed his eyes. Sasagawa continued persistently, and the tip of his tongue circled Shiina's nipple. Once it got hard, he took it in his mouth, biting and sucking on it, and then repeated the process.

"I'm...not...a girl!"

Shiina protested with difficulty, but Sasagawa didn't want to hear it. It was hard to bear the sensation of Sasagawa's fingers on him. A ticklish, horrifying, uneasy sensation lingered upon his skin. He squeezed his eyes shut to block out this situation. The only thing keeping him going was waiting for the sound of the train creaking its way to the platform. He longed to hear it, but it didn't seem like it would ever come.

The 10 minutes Sasagawa had mentioned seemed extremely long. However, Sasagawa didn't waste a second. His lips left Shiina's chest, and searched for something else, pushing upon his neck. Following his well-shaped jawbone, they finally rested again on his lips.

Shiina realized Sasagawa's true intentions at this lusty kiss. He couldn't escape, so he just had to accept it. One of Sasagawa's hands traveled down his chest, while the other one pulled his belt out, revealing Shiina's hip

bones. The hands went lower, and fingertips pulled out Shiina's member.

"Ow!" A sharp pain raced through the place Sasagawa had touched, and Shiina couldn't help but yelp.

"Hm?" Pulling his lips away, Sasagawa peered at Shiina's face.

If he made excuses, he'd be embarrassed later, so he figured he might as well tell the truth. Shiina looked down anxiously, and then slowly said, "I just came a little while ago, so it hurts."

"With who?"

He hadn't expected to be asked so much detail, but he had no intention of disobeying Sasagawa. So, Shiina revealed his relationship with Kanako as bluntly as possible. "A rich lady. She gives me 10,000 yen if I do it with her, so I meet her occasionally."

Please don't ask me anything more, he desperately thought. He was upset that he didn't have the guts to say it out loud.

"Hmmm...well then I guess I shouldn't make you come," Sasagawa said.

Shiina felt relieved at the way Sasagawa took it so casually. However, Sasagawa's fingers crept to the backside of his jeans, and Shiina opened his eyes with surprise and grabbed Sasagawa's arm.

"Hey, what are you doing?" he squeaked.

Sasagawa's fingers were stroking the area by his butt in a provocative way.

"Well, you said you won't be able to get hard. I don't have much time left, so this is the only way left

that I can enjoy myself." His dry fingertips went higher.

Shiina shivered, and tensed his butt to try to block Sasagawa's movements. He let out a short sigh, and looked up. He saw Sasagawa's face, looking at him with eyes like a snake's. The corners of his mouth were pulled up wickedly, and he held out his middle finger, showing it to Shiina. Then he licked it, coating it with saliva.

The hand that had been resting on his butt pulled Shiina toward Sasagawa. Panicked, Shiina looked down. This time, the wet finger was making its way inside his jeans.

"Ah...mnnfh!"

The wet sensation teased the place Sasagawa's fingers had just been poking at. Shiina raised his face with an anguished look on it, and rested his chin on top of Sasagawa's shoulder. He felt sick at the feeling of a finger entering him. Sasagawa's finger twisted gently around inside him, as if he was loosening up a woman's pussy.

"Ah...ahhh...ahhh!!"

Even though it was supposed to be uncomfortable, Sasagawa was pushing right on Shiina's erogenous zone, and an excited voice had escaped from him. That lustful sound made a heated feeling boil up inside him. Hearing this, Sasagawa's hands didn't stop, but tried to pull more pleasure out of him.

Sasagawa was different from other teachers. He had been interesting. That's the only reason why Shiina always looked at him. Shiina had been misunderstood, but what had he done to deserve this? He felt pity for himself.

As Sasagawa held him, Shiina's shoulders began to shake.

"What, are you crying? How cute!" Sasagawa had sensed the change in Shiina. He released his body a little to look at his face.

Shiina looked up, his eyes wet and his hair disheveled. The emotional silence continued.

Sasagawa squinted, as if he had just seen something he didn't want to have seen. "I didn't mean to take it this far." He breathed heavily, and pulled out his finger.

Shiina perceived his words as an apology, but he was dead-wrong.

"Wh-what?" he gasped as Sasagawa unbuttoned his jeans, and pulled down his underwear.

Shiina was shocked. Sasagawa grabbed him, lifting him up. Sasagawa propped up one leg against the wall, and sat Shiina down on one of his thighs. Shiina didn't know what was happening. He still resisted. Sasagawa saw this, and with impatient hands opened the front of his own pants and exposed the proof of his boiling lust. He squeezed a clear liquid from the head of his penis, spreading it over his shaft. He stroked it a few times, and Shiina froze at this terrible scene of Sasagawa getting ready for sex.

"S-stop it!" Shiina exclaimed. "What do you think you're doing?!"

At this, Sasagawa's eyes threw daggers at him. He pulled Shiina's jeans and underwear down to his knees, lifting him up higher on his thigh so his ass stuck out. Shiina had truly become his teacher's victim.

"You...oww..." Shiina gasped.

Sasagawa's wet member began to enter his body. This situation was beyond terrible, and all Shiina could do was shut his eyes to escape from reality. But Sasagawa began to go deeper and deeper inside of him. Shiina's inner walls were stretched by Sasagawa's shape. After Sasagawa got past the most painful place, all that was left was to bear the pain of how large he was.

"Nnn...ahh, ahh!"

Sasagawa thrust as deeply as he could, and a large shock reverberated in Shiina's brain. Sasagawa pulled himself out, and then rammed back in. Shiina panted from the pain of his actions.

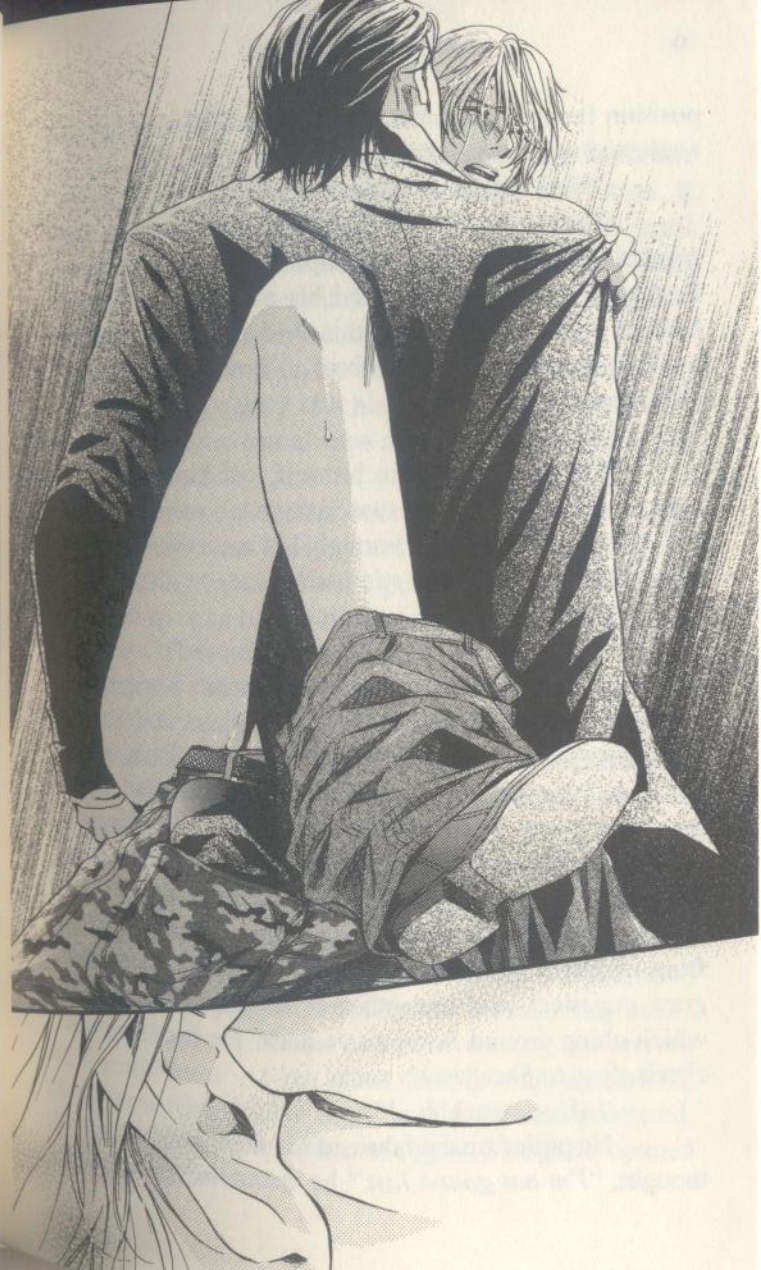
"I know you don't want to, but if you don't hold on to me tightly, you'll fall on your ass to the floor," Sasagawa said calmly.

Timidly, Shiina opened his eyes, and saw Sasagawa's gaze boring into him. Even though Sasagawa was indulging only in his own pleasure, he was surprisingly calm.

Shiina was surprised at Sasagawa's attitude, and also pissed off. He was the one opening his mouth and making noises every time Sasagawa entered him; he was the only one reacting.

As soon as he realized this, his cheeks flushed. He was so embarrassed at the tears that had gathered in the corners of his eyes, he couldn't bear it. He hung his head in shame and clung to Sasagawa's arms, turning his head away.

Sasagawa wrapped his arms around the back of Shiina's knees, holding him up strongly. They were in a



position facing each other, and he pounded into Shiina again and again this way.

"Nnn...aahh...ah...haaa...ughh..."

No matter how hard Shiina tried to stifle the sounds that escaped from his lips, the vibrations from Sasagawa entering him forced his mouth open. In his head he couldn't understand this abnormal behavior, but as he got used to it, the embers of heat inside of him reawakened.

No, I can't!

He tried to restrain himself, but his body kept searching for the pleasure that Sasagawa's member gave him. If he held on tightly enough, his inner walls would twitch, coaxing out more stimulation.

"Ah...nnnhaa..."

The friction against the place he wanted increased, and he emitted an aroused sound. Sasagawa's thrusts became more constricted and violent, and Shiina clung desperately to him, burying his face in Sasagawa's chest. In between his legs, his member that had been painful to touch, began to produce dripping, clear nectar. Every time he inhaled desperately, the desire to ejaculate welled up in his abdomen. He had gone past the point of no return, but Sasagawa showed no signs of withdrawing from inside of him now that it had loosened up. Shiina grew impatient, and strengthened the grip of his hands which clung around Sasagawa's neck. He drew his hot cheek close to Sasagawa's neck.

"Ah...aaaaaahhh...!"

He pulled up the fabric of his shirt, and just as he thought, *"I'm not gonna last,"* he ejaculated his cloudy

cum onto Sasagawa's abdomen.

The heat from his body started to recede. Shiina stared at the scene with vacant eyes. He had let go. It was too late to make excuses now. He had been raped by another man, his teacher, and was tortured by the fact that he had let go. The humiliation was too much for him to bear, and he began to sob.

Sasagawa put an arm around his shoulders, and whispered gently into his ear, "If you're too lonely by yourself, you can always rely on me. My arms will always be open."

Shiina opened his wet eyes slowly. There was no way he could trust Sasagawa. The man's hidden agenda was probably to taunt him to get pleasure, lead him into a pseudo-love so he could control and play with Shiina's emotions. That's why he couldn't fall for it. He wasn't so stupid to fall and be the bait in this trap. His head told him to be cautious, but his heart was attracted to Sasagawa. Shiina was disgusted at his own weakness.

Just how weak can you be? he scolded himself, depressed.

"Shiina." He bit his lip at the sound of the sweet voice that reached his ears. He ignored it. Sasagawa's hot lips pushed softly against the exposed flesh that peeked out from the neck of his parka. "I can save you..." Sasagawa spoke as if he was the only way out.

The train Shiina had been waiting for arrived at the platform. At the same time it was announced, Sasagawa released his body, just as he had promised. Without showing an ounce of regret, Sasagawa opened the door and left.

The bathroom felt strangely silent with no one else there, and the flickering fluorescent light overhead was annoying.

Shiina was in a stupor. He leaned his back against the wall, unable to move. His hands fell loosely to his sides, and the sensation of someone else's body on his lingered.

Chapter 3

Watching his classmates exchange their morning hellos from the corner of his eye, Shiina sat down in his seat. His glasses slid from the force of him looking down. Without fixing them, he sighed deeply and fell prostrate on top of his desk. He crossed his arms and felt at ease with the darkness inside of them. He had wanted to stay home that day.

He felt so uncomfortable that he'd be forced to see Sasagawa's face, it pissed him off. Their bodies had joined in a bathroom at a train station, and somehow Sasagawa had gotten to him. He couldn't understand why he had shown so much of himself to Sasagawa.

Math was a core class and was held everyday. If he didn't show up, Sasagawa would surely ridicule him. Shiina had no guts, he was a weakling. That's what he'd taunt Shiina with.

Shiina very much wanted to run away, but he didn't have enough patience to endure more taunting. That's why he had shown up as he was supposed to.

After first and second periods were over, it was time for math class.

He wasn't even this nervous when it was time for final exams.

Just as the bell rang, his heart started beating wildly.

The sliding door to the classroom opened with a creak, and Sasagawa entered the classroom, looking as he always did. He wore the filthy white coat, and dark grey slacks. On his feet were brown sandals. Shiina couldn't raise his face, but he felt Sasagawa's presence in the room.

Sasagawa stood at the platform, and began the roll call. If someone answered, he usually didn't look up. Therefore, all the students who he called gave half-hearted answers.

"Shiina," he called in a low voice.

Shiina's heart jumped in his chest. "...Here," he answered, looking off to the side.

It's okay, just act normal. He tried to comfort himself. He gripped his hands together tightly underneath the desk.

"Can't hear you," Sasagawa's sharp voice echoed in the classroom. He was lying. Shiina had answered just as he always did.

Shiina raised his face sullenly, and saw Sasagawa's eyes looking right at him. Sasagawa's black hair was swept back, and his eyebrows were raised. On top of that, out of all the students in the room, Sasagawa's strong gaze was focused only on him.

Sasagawa was the one who had kissed him so many times the night before, he was the one that brought him such heat. He was also the only person who had found out the darkness that was in the bottom of his heart.

"I can't hear you when you mumble," Sasagawa reprimanded in an arrogant voice. The way his lips moved was strangely obscene.

Shiina preserved a cool expression, and apologized in a louder voice. "I'm sorry."

Sasagawa continued to stare at Shiina, as if he was making fun of him. His eyes were challenging him. From the side Shiina felt Ai's steady gaze. Feeling both of their eyes on him, Shiina began to feel uncomfortable. He trembled slightly with nervousness. He couldn't even breathe comfortably. He pretended to be cool to hide his tender heart. But even that had been exposed, and he didn't know how to fix it. His uneasiness grew because he didn't have the answer.

Sasagawa shifted his gaze back to the attendance book, and called out the next student's name. After a few more people, Shiina relaxed his shoulders. He pushed back his bangs from his forehead. From the window of the classroom, the sky seemed high and, even though the trees surrounding the building were already turning yellow, he began to sweat.

Sasagawa told them to take out their textbooks, and everyone did so with a rustle. Shiina focused so much on Sasagawa's actions during class that he didn't learn a thing.

He frowned at the track team that was kicking up dust on the other side of the sidewalk. Shiina, who didn't participate in club activities, was on his way home, and he often passed by the junior high groups around this

time. Their school hours seemed to be the same.

Unlike high school students who wore their uniforms however they pleased, junior high kids still obeyed the school and teacher's regulations. Their neat appearances were refreshing. Just looking at them revealed their sense of discipline.

"Ow!" Shiina got hit by something from behind. He turned around. It looked as if a sports bag or something had hit him.

"Oh, sorry!"

The high voice of a young boy who hadn't yet gone through puberty rang out beside Shiina. He could tell at a glance that the boy wasn't sorry at all. But he wasn't going to get mad at something this trivial, so he let it pass.

The boy fell into step with his two friends, and as Shiina passed them, he exclaimed, "Hayato!"

Shiina barely spoke to his younger brother at home. He looked down at his brother now.

Hayato's tanned face was full of contempt. His two friends gazed at both of them strangely then one of them said, "Oh!" and began to talk excitedly.

"Hey, are you Hayato's older brother that we've heard so much about? Wow! You're so cool!" His eyes widened as he stared up at Shiina.

Shiina's eyes narrowed as he said, "What have you heard about me?"

"Oh, well my sister is a first year high school student, and ever since junior high she's been saying how cool you are and how popular you are with girls," the boy answered.

"My sister, too!" the other boy added. "Even though she's really ugly she always talks about how she wants you to hug her!"

Hayato shut his mouth tight at the sight of his two friends' cheerful conversation.

Having a lively brother like those two would be fun, Shiina thought. Their pureness and cheerfulness relaxed him, and he smiled broadly.

"That's enough. Let's go," Hayato called in a commanding tone of voice. He wasn't amused at how his friends were swarming around the person he loathed the most.

"Some time, can we come to your house while your brother is home, Hayato?" one of his friends suggested. "Maybe he can teach us to be as cool as him!"

"Yeah, me too, me too!" the other friend chimed in.

They both raised their hands, approaching Shiina with serious faces. They were so childish—definitely junior high kids.

"Well, I'm not home very often," Shiina said, turning them down with a light smile.

The boys' faces darkened.

"Really? Aw, that sucks!" they cried out.

"But you can come play with Hayato! You can come over as much as you want. 'Kay?" An innocent smile spread across Shiina's face. The two boys looked up at him as if they were worshipping a god.

Raising his face up from the pushy kids, his eyes met his brother's.

Hayato's eyes were filled with nothing but hate.

"What do you think you're doing, trying to act like my brother?" Hayato yelled. "Don't ever talk to me in public again wearing the uniform of that idiot school!"

"Sorry, I won't do it again," Shiina promised.

Even though they were both headed for the same place, Hayato had somehow gotten home before Shiina, and had been waiting for him in the entryway with a sneer on his face. No matter how hard he trained with the baseball team, in a real fight Shiina would beat him. However, Hayato wouldn't admit that. But he knew that no matter how much he detested Shiina or mocked him, Shiina would never raise a hand to him. That's why he could say those things to his brother.

"Also, this weekend all three of us are going to visit Grandma in Nagoya," Hayato declared.

That number of people left Shiina out. How childish.

"Really? Have fun," Shiina said calmly.

This seemed to make Hayato even madder. His face turned bright red and he screamed, "I said stop acting like you're my brother! Are you stupid? You must have an IQ of zero! Aren't you embarrassed to go to that high school for idiots?"

Shiina was annoyed at the way Hayato was purposefully trying to offend him. How did Hayato want him to react?

Shiina corrected him, saying, "Idiots? Actually

it's a normal-level high school. Of course, it's not as good as the one you want to go to."

Hayato looked at him with a face that said, "You're still trying to continue this stupid conversation?" He bit his lips, and twisted his face in anguish. "Nevermind, just shut up! Get out of my sight!"

Shiina didn't know if it was just because Hayato was being a sore loser or he was trying to get the last word, but Shiina definitely knew that that wasn't something a younger brother should say to his older brother.

He had let everything pass lightly up to this point, but he suddenly couldn't put up with it anymore. Lifting his chin, he faced Hayato with flashing eyes. He stepped forward with a *thump*.

"Hayato! Your friend's on the phone!" their mother's cheerful voice called from the living room.

"Okay, Mama! I'll be right there!" Hayato answered, a complete change in his attitude.

Shiina burst out laughing. Hayato reflexively lifted his face, as if to complain again.

Shiina couldn't bear holding back his laughter so he covered his mouth with his hand. He arrogantly said, "You're 15 and you still call her 'Mama'? How disgusting! Are you sure you're not still sucking her tits?"

Hayato couldn't believe that he had just been insulted by his brother, who they left out of the family. Indignantly, he grabbed Shiina's collar.

Crash! A loud noise reverberated through the entryway. Their mother nervously appeared from

the living room. "Hayato? What's wrong? What happened?"

Hayato held his elbow and made a pained expression.

You're the idiot who fell down, it's not my fault! Shiina looked down coldly at his brother who nestled closely to their mother.

"Why would you do such a mean thing to your brother? Jun, answer me!" Their mother's accusing voice was extremely calm.

"Someone with such an ugly face isn't any brother of mine," Shiina scoffed.

So what, now you're gonna act like you're my mother? He was amazed. It was annoying even to talk to them after such a long time. He turned on his heel and headed for his room on the second floor.

His mother raised her voice, trying to stop him. "Jun! How could you say such a thing! Stop right there! Apologize to Hayato right now!"

"Why?" Shiina asked coldly.

"Because he's your brother, of course!" She tightly embraced her 15-year-old son with a forbidding look on her face. She raised her eyes, and looked at him with the eyes of a stranger.

"Not Hayato. You. What right do you have to scold me? You're a terrible mother!" Shiina said, his eyes full of resentment.

His mother did not flinch from these harsh words. Shiina got even more irritated and ran up the stairs, secluding himself in his room. He promptly locked the door and put his headphones on. From the other side

of the music that flowed into his ears, he could hear his mother's voice yelling at him. Sighing, he leaned back against the door, and hit it as hard as he could with his body. Before long, her voice died down. Normally she never paid any attention to him, but when Hayato got hurt she always overreacted like this. At times like these, so much anger welled up inside of him that he didn't even know where it came from.

Sitting down on his bed, he desperately tried to concentrate on the melody flowing into his ears. He wanted to immerse himself in his own world, where he could escape freely to.

Maybe it was because he couldn't calm down, but he couldn't feel completely alone. He casually clicked his tongue, trying to snap out of it. Insecurity lingered from that sensation, and he ran his wet tongue once more along the top of his mouth. Just this little action brought back to mind the immoral events at the train station.

His whole body began to tremble. Sasagawa had grabbed every part of his body. At that moment, when those pathetic tears rolled down his cheeks, Sasagawa had held him and told him he'd save him. If he believed those words, could he escape from this oppressive, stifling darkness?

His breath stopped at the thought of Sasagawa's scowling face.

Shiina grasped the cord that hung at his chest, and pulled the headphones from his ears.

It was a sunny day during a tranquil lunch break. Shiina was waiting for fifth period math class. He had bought bread and a sports drink at his usual shop and begun to walk aimlessly toward the roof when a girl called out to him in a sharp tone of voice.

"Sorry, Shiina-kun. Can I talk to you?"

He turned around to see the girl who sat behind Ai. He had rarely spoken to her, but since they were classmates and their seats were somewhat close, he remembered her name.

"Morishita-san?"

Morishita was wearing hoop earrings that glittered in the light, and her cheeks were lightly tinged with pink. Even though her face looked naïve, the way she stood with her arms crossed and her legs poking out of her short skirt was provocative.

At Morishita's request, he went with her to the north side of school, and they hid themselves on the first floor stair landing. This staircase was usually only used to get to classrooms, so students rarely passed by during lunch.

Playing with her long overly bleached and damaged-looking hair, Morishita spoke without making eye contact. "Um, it's about Ai."

"Yeah?" Shiina prompted.

"Don't you think she's acting snobby lately?" Morishita babbled. "It's so annoying. You might not know it, but she thinks she's so cool because she gets to sit beside you. She tells us stuff she's observed about you everyday, and sometimes she just gets so stuck up. It's like, 'Who the hell do you think you are?' you know?"

It really pisses me off."

She had just been talking to Ai normally before lunch. Girls were scary. They could easily hide such animosity. Shiina usually put up a cool exterior, but Morishita had a genuine split personality.

"Yeah, so what do you want me to do about it?"

He looked at Morishita, tilting his head with a bored expression on his face.

Even though she sensed he wasn't about to go along with it, she quickly responded, "Ignore Ai."

They barely knew each other's names and yet she was ordering him around. Even if she was a girl, he wouldn't put up with that. Shiina scratched the back of his head, and laughed faintly. He looked down at Morishita.

"Even though I have no intention of being friendly to her anyway? Isn't that kind of difficult?"

"Why? All you have to do is ignore her if she talks to you. Just that. Isn't it easy?" Morishita asked petulantly.

"I can't be cold to someone for no reason," Shiina said.

"I have a reason. It's because I like you, Shiina-kun," she confessed, tightening the corners of her mouth. Shiina fell silent as she added with an angry look on her face, "So that's why Ai gets on my nerves."

If she found her friend to be so unpleasant because of this, it would be a very short-lived friendship. He felt pity for Ai, who had no idea this was going on. Morishita probably thought she was better for Shiina than Ai.

"Sorry, but I don't feel the same," Shiina said coldly.

She threw down the plastic bottle she held in one hand with a bang, and with the other one she rubbed the tip of her nose.

"If I had to choose, it'd be her because Nishida-san's cuter." Nishida was Ai's last name. Shiina laughed sarcastically.

Morishita glared at him with wet eyes. "You're really cold, Shiina-kun," she said.

"Sorry, I've always been like this. Also, I won't go out with a girl I don't love," he said, completely refusing her and keeping her at a distance. If he gave her a half-hearted reply, she wouldn't understand.

Even though she acted like she was convinced, she looked like she was going to say, "I won't give up!" and then looked as if it was just too much trouble. "Nevermind. I understand," she said. Her face was smeared with mascara tracks, and she sniffled loudly. Her act was very convincing, but Shiina was unaffected by it.

"That's mean. Shiina's hiding out here making a girl cry," a voice suddenly said from above them, and they both looked up at the same time. Bent over the railing, with a wicked smile across his face, was their math teacher.

"Hey, it's none of your business, Sasagawa! Go somewhere else!" Morishita wiped her tears on the long sleeves of her cardigan, waving him away exaggeratedly. It was no wonder she was mad—he had seen her get turned down after confessing her feelings to

the boy she liked.

Shiina silently stared at Sasagawa, and his teacher returned the gaze with a teasing look in his eyes. Sasagawa began to come down the stairs. Without hesitation, he stood next to Shiina.

"Don't pay attention to him, Morishita," he said. "He isn't interested in nice girls like Nishida or sexy girls like you. He's into other perverted stuff."

Morishita was speechless.

You're the one who's a pervert.

Shiina glared at him, but Sasagawa ignored it. He looked at Morishita, as if enjoying her reaction.

"What do you know, Sasagawa? Who said you could eavesdrop, anyway? I can't believe you!" Morishita's eyes were wet with tears.

"Don't give me that!" Sasagawa retorted. "Your voice is so high, it carries everywhere. I would've heard even if I didn't want to!"

"Whatever! Just go away!" She pushed him towards the bottom of the stairs. As she pushed on the front of Sasagawa's white coat, he raised his voice with laughter. He had the worst personality ever. Just watching him pissed Shiina off. It was pathetic that he had relied on this man even for one second.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa grabbed his arm and whispered that into his ear. Shiina opened his eyes wide, and looked up at Sasagawa, but he had already gone down the stairs.

Shiina stood stock still until the sight of his teacher vanished. He heard Morishita's voice between sobs call out from behind him, "But, I'm serious. I really

like you, Shiina-kun!”

At the sight of Morishita's mournful face, he could tell that she *was* serious. Even though he knew that, what had grabbed him weren't her heavy words, but the sound of Sasagawa's voice whispering that echoed over and over again inside his ears.

Chapter 4

Shiina wasn't good at waiting for people. He lifted both hands from his knees and put them on the table, sighing loudly. He looked around the store, which had piano music flowing in the background. About ninety percent of the customers were women; the other ten percent were probably their boyfriends. In other words, the only guy who had come here by choice was probably him. He smiled in a self-deprecating way and started to regret his decision a little.

He tilted the glass of cold water the young shopkeeper had given him, and the ice cubes clinked inside the cup.

“I'm sorry about that!” a woman suddenly burst out, heading towards him. “Were you waiting long? I'm Misaki, the owner.”

This was the woman he had been waiting for, and he quickly put the glass back down.

“I'm sorry to bother you at such a busy time. My name is Shiina.” He bowed his head and then looked at the shop's owner again. Maybe it was because this was a cake shop, but her round body looked like it had eaten one too many carbohydrates. Or maybe the chef's coat she was wearing made her look even bigger.

The owner pulled out a chair and sat down facing Shiina. She pushed her round glasses back up her nose with her thumb and forefinger, and began to speak. "Shiina-kun, right now you're in high school, right?"

"Yes, I'm a second year student."

"Can you tell me why you want to work at my store?" Her fat fingers gripped the side of her elbow, and she looked at him questioningly. Her eyes were so narrow, it was hard to tell if they were opened or closed.

Shiina kept eye contact with her and answered promptly, "Because it's close to my school." He couldn't tell her he purposefully wanted to choose a place he knew lots of girls would gather at, so he could try to correct his warped disposition.

However, she seemed fooled by his simple lie, and nodded enthusiastically. "I see. I'm okay with a reason like that. Mostly girls come to the interview for our shop, you see..."

"Then I can't have the job?" A confused look crossed his face and he wondered if he should leave.

The owner kept smiling, and said calmly, "Oh, that's not what I meant. I just think it's nice for a change, really! It might be rude of me to say, but you're really good-looking and I think customers will come back just to see you. If you don't have a problem with that, you can have the job."

Shiina had already expected that he might be put in the position to attract customers. At the bar he had worked at until last month, the same kind of thing happened. Except that time, the other female workers

had tried to compete for his affections and caused problems. Eventually, Shiina was asked to leave since he had been there the shortest time.

But this friendly-looking shop owner probably wouldn't do something so irrational. Even if her aim was for him to go around and touch a bunch of girls, he wouldn't care.

Shiina lifted his face, and with a steady gaze said, "Oh, I don't mind at all. I can start any time. Thank you very much."

He bowed his head deeply. The owner hurriedly bowed her head in turn. She told him she would explain the particulars of the job later, but first she would show him around the shop and explain the rules to him. His first shift would be the next evening.

She saw him off politely, and he headed toward the train station. The evening autumn wind chilled his skin beneath the white T-shirt under his cardigan. If he hadn't just happened to pass by the cake shop, and seen the "Help Wanted" sign on the window, he wouldn't be working tomorrow. He'd gone inside the shop on impulse. One of the reasons for such a sudden action on his part was because he had to quit his last job, so he had too much time on his hands. And because of the incident the other day with Hayato, he felt even more depressed when he had to go home. But above all, he wanted to end things with Kanako so Sasagawa wouldn't find out anything more about them.

Sasagawa probably thought he was sleeping with an older woman just to get money. But that's what Shiina wanted him to believe. He tightened his lips and

walked through the town which had been colored by the setting sun. Kanako was a mother figure to him, and when he was with her, pleasure replaced the pressure in his chest and the sex fulfilled the hunger he had for affection. He never wanted Sasagawa to find out that his dirty sex life was a way to keep his mental balance.

He got off the train at a nearby station, and walked on foot towards his house. It was a cheap panel-construction house his father had built in the corner of a residential area. From the gate post to the backyard, every space possible was filled with seasonal flowers his mother had planted, and they all seemed to be dyed orange because of the sunset. He stepped onto the front porch. The nameplate looked like it was out of a fairy-tale; it was nauseating. Small potted plants surrounded Shiina.

Even though it was almost dark outside, there wasn't a single light on inside the house. In the deathly silence, he began to remember what Hayato had told him. *"This weekend, all three of us are going to visit Grandma in Nagoya!"*

Today was Friday. His dad had probably come home early from work and they had all left cheerfully together. They had closed up the house, and as usual, hadn't mentioned a word about it to him. It wasn't unusual for something like this to happen. Even though they were family, they had nothing to do with Shiina. None of them would try to cheer him up, but no one would try to meddle with him, either.

He slipped his backpack off one of his shoulders, and searched his front pocket half-heartedly. However,

there was nothing in it. That was where he usually put the house key, but he didn't remember doing it this morning. His mother had still been there, so he hadn't been paying attention to locking up behind him.

Panicked, he took his wallet out of his school uniform pocket. Checking inside, he saw that all he had left was 5,000 yen. The rest of the money he had received from Kanako was already in the bank. He didn't need that money for school, and he didn't want to carry around that much in case he got accosted by the hyenas again, so he had left his debit card in his room as well.

In other words, with the amount of money left in his wallet, he wouldn't be able to survive until they came home. He felt helpless, and began to feel depressed when he thought about having to go to work tomorrow. Where would he sleep? He didn't have a single friend he could ask. He set his backpack down on the brick red tiled porch. He sat down as well, and let out a deep sigh. He brushed his bangs out of his eyes, and took his glasses off roughly.

He thought about breaking the glass and getting in that way, but quickly nixed that idea. Even though no one would think about trying to steal from this kind of house, his mother had had a security system installed. A signal would be sent to the security company, and he wasn't sure if they would believe him that he was a family member. He couldn't even trust that his mother would vouch for him if they contacted her, after the latest incident with Hayato. The only person he could think of who would lend him money in such a short

amount of time was Kanako.

He folded up his glasses. He felt pathetic that she was the first person he thought of. Shiina looked to the side with a gloomy look on his face. He had just gotten a new job so he could have an excuse to break off their relationship, too. How ironic. He was about to ruin his plan. He began to feel depressed. However, before he knew it, he was dialing her number on his cellphone. "Your call cannot be completed as dialed. The person you are trying to reach is currently out of range of service..." He hung up in the middle of the simple announcement.

Kanako had her own family. She was probably busy. He gave up on the idea. But who else could he ask? There was no way he'd pretend he was homeless and stay at the train station or the park. In a warmer season maybe, but there was no way he could endure the cold mornings with just his school uniform on.

He opened his address book which was barely filled in, and saw a serious-looking handwriting. At this point, he had no choice. Feeling pitiful, he dialed the number of his high school. "Um, excuse me. This is Shiina Jun from Class 2-F. Is Nakahara-sensei still at school?"

The young woman on the other end told him to please hold, and Shiina waited, listening to the background music coming from the phone.

"Hello? What's up?"

The voice of his homeroom teacher eased his nervousness. Taking a deep breath, he asked the first favor of his life.

"Sensei...I'm really sorry to ask this, but can

you lend me some money?"

Returning to school, he knew that Nakahara-sensei and the principal were the only ones still there. It had gotten completely dark, and the light coming from inside the staff room was bright.

Nakahara sat by the window, away from the principal's desk, and he spoke in a hushed voice. "I can lend you some money, but are you sure you'll be okay at a hotel until your family gets home?" He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair. He motioned for Shiina to sit down in a nearby chair, but Shiina remained standing.

Nakahara was the science teacher, so he, too, wore a white coat. Sasagawa's was filthy, but since Nakahara was married, his was always freshly washed and clean. Up close, the difference was evident. His white coat was nicely pressed, and had a pleasant scent.

Keeping his face expressionless, Shiina said, "I always take care of myself anyway. I'll be fine."

"That's not what I mean...oh, did you get a hold of your parents?" Nakahara asked.

"No...not yet," Shiina said darkly, and it seemed Nakahara had misunderstood him. If his teacher prodded any further, he would really be in trouble.

"Well, how about we contact them just to check? It's not that I don't believe you, though," Nakahara said cautiously, and settled back into his chair.

Shiina didn't know who else would ask to borrow money from a teacher unless they really needed

it. But he figured there were probably some students who would make that kind of request. From the standpoint of his teacher, Shiina wouldn't be able to say the chances of that were zero. Since Shiina was so shy, people usually misunderstood him.

"What's wrong?" Nakahara asked.

"I don't know either my mother or father's cellphone numbers...our family isn't very close," he said hesitantly, and looked down. He said it because he didn't want Nakahara to interfere with his abnormal family life.

But Nakahara kept on going with a calm face. "But your little brother went on the trip with them, didn't he? Isn't that what you told me earlier?"

What he said was true. However, Shiina couldn't tell him the rest of the story, that his family had neglected him. Shiina clenched his fist with humiliation, and wrinkled his forehead. He tried to regain composure by slowly closing his eyes. Nakahara probably noticed his behavior was different than usual, so he came up with a compromise.

"I'm almost positive we have their contact numbers here. As soon as I talk to them, I'll lend you the money. Okay?" he said gently, and patted Shiina's shoulder.

It was probably to comfort him, but Shiina began to tremble with nervousness at the unfamiliar touch of a man.

"Oh, sorry..." Nakahara whispered, and withdrew his hand with a surprised look on his face, his eyes opening wide. He took Shiina's file from his

desk drawer, and then picked up the phone receiver. All Shiina could do beside him was lament the reaction he gave to Nakahara's touch.

"Hello, this is Jun-kun's homeroom teacher from Futaba High School. My name is Nakahara. Yes. Yes."

Shiina wondered if Nakahara was talking to his mother or father.

The sensation Nakahara's touch left on his skin brought back terrible memories, and Shiina sighed, looking down.

"Yes, and I understand that, Mrs. Shiina, but... Yes." Suddenly Nakahara's tone of voice changed, and Shiina snapped back to reality. He stared at his teacher's serious yet bitter-looking face. "I understand. At any rate, you won't be back for a week? I understand. I will look after Jun-kun myself, then. Yes. Yes, goodbye." Nakahara looked a bit fed up as he put down the receiver and faced Shiina.

"Apparently your brother got appendicitis and is hospitalized in Nagoya, so they won't be back for a while. They said it'll take about a week for his medicine to work, and your mother will look after him. Your father left from there to go on a business trip."

"Okay." Shiina received the news with an uninterested look on his face. He knew there was something more to the story; he could tell from the look on Nakahara's face. His mother probably had the same attitude she always did. She probably made Nakahara uncomfortable. He began to detest his mother even more for badly treating anyone that had anything to do with

Shiina. He felt miserable, and began to feel apologetic towards Nakahara. He closed his eyes with a painful expression on his face, and covered his face with one hand.

"Is your family..." Nakahara began to ask, paused and then abandoned his question altogether. He sighed. Shiina put himself on guard nervously, but Nakahara instead said in a more cheerful voice, "Hey, Shiina, wanna stay at my house?"

"What?" Shiina's eyes widened at this sudden suggestion.

Nakahara crossed both arms, and leaned forward on his knees as he continued. "Right now, my wife is nine months pregnant. Her due date is coming up soon. It's our first child, so of course I want to be with her more, but starting tomorrow I have to teach the supplementary lessons after school. Would it be okay if you spent a little of your free time with her? How about that? Of course, you can stay until your family comes home."

Shiina stared at Nakahara's serious eyes. He was happy at this proposal, but he wasn't used to being taken cared of by someone else, so it was hard to agree with it. He looked down and put one hand on his chin, and listened to Nakahara go on. "My wife was a chef, so she makes really good food! She can make anything." Nakahara's eyes wrinkled when he smiled. He was probably about the same age as Sasagawa. It was a friendly smile.

"Food, huh? I think I'll take you up on that..." Shiina smiled shyly, tilting his head to the side. He soon

realized that Nakahara wasn't asking him to stay at his house out of a sense of obligation. He wasn't the type who would do something with malicious intent.

Taking Shiina's smile as a sign of agreement, Nakahara stood up from his chair. "All right, then it's decided! Your things...well I guess you can't get them if you can't get into the house, huh? Well if there's anything you need, we can buy it on the way. Come on, I'll drive us home." He pushed the chair back under the desk and gathered up his things.

Shiina watched his teacher as he stooped over and asked, "Sensei, where do you live?"

"The north part of Futaba."

Good, that means it's in the neighborhood. I can still get to work easily. For the first time in a long time, he remembered the warmth of someone else's generosity.

It was about 8 o'clock when they finally arrived at Nakahara's apartment. Even though Shiina had heard teachers didn't make much money, it was a nice, new building. The walls were concrete, and there were many identical buildings lined up down the road. Small shrubs surrounded the walls, and under the emergency stair landing was a bike rack. Many children's bikes were lined up there in a disorderly fashion.

This place was probably designed for families. He could see children's toys lying here and there, on verandas and in the yard by the first floor. Shiina felt out of place in this kind of situation; even though he had a

family, he was accustomed to being alone.

Nakahara led him to the middle of the southern building, and they began to climb the stairs, stopping by a room on the second floor. He rang the door bell and heard a sweet-sounding young woman's voice call, "Welcome home!" from the other side of the door. The door opened with a creak. The young woman's large eyes rested on Shiina, who was standing behind Nakahara.

She looked as if she was still in her twenties. Nakahara's wife had a surprisingly innocent face. She was so cute that if she weren't pregnant, she'd probably get hit on anywhere she went.

"Mami-chan, this is the student I told you about on the phone. He'll be staying with us for a while, so take good care of him, okay?" Nakahara cautioned her with a smile.

Shiina pulled himself together and started to introduce himself, "Um, I'm..."

However, the face of Nakahara's wife, whom he had called "Mami-chan," lit up and she interrupted him with a squeal. "What? Oh my god! He is so cute! So this is the kind of kid you teach, Yuu-kun?"

"Yuu...kun?" Shiina looked up at his teacher, and Nakahara looked at him, embarrassed.

"My first name is Yuuichi. Anyway..." He motioned for Shiina to come inside. Shiina did so, and entered the living room, bowing.

It was smaller than Shiina's house, but was decorated in warm colors and seemed very comfortable.

Mami held her large stomach with both hands and slowly sat down on the sofa. "Can you tell me your

name one more time?" Her face looked even cuter when she smiled so innocently.

"Ah, my name is Shiina. Shiina Jun. I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Mrs. Nakahara."

"Oh, don't worry about it! It's fine! Our baby's room is still empty. It's a girl, so the room is decorated kind of cutesy, so I hope you don't mind. Yuu-kun will get out a futon for you later." She stroked her large stomach tenderly. Nakahara sat beside her. Shiina could sense they cared about each other a lot, and were eagerly anticipating their first child.

He wished he could have been born into a family like theirs instead of with an impudent mom and an apathetic dad. Feeling pain swell up in his chest, Shiina looked at both of them and said, "Are you sure it's okay if I stay in your baby's room?"

At his uncertain voice, Mami smiled broadly. "Oh, it's fine! I'm sure you want some privacy, especially to call your girlfriend or something!" she said jokingly, which relaxed him. Mami's friendly personality was nice. He was sure this was one of the things that attracted Nakahara to her. Mami laughed, but then her face turned suddenly serious. "Oh, by the way, Jun-kun...I don't care if you call Yuu-kun 'Sensei,' but I want you to call me by my first name. Calling me 'Mrs. Nakahara' makes me feel old!"

"Okay, Mami...san?" He tilted his head, which made Mami's face light up again.

"Call me Mami-chan!"

"Hey, now!" Nakahara chided Mami. His expression was gentle, and Shiina could tell he was

crazy about her.

Shiina chuckled and repeated her words, "Mami-chan."

Mami, who had been called what she requested, smiled happily. "Oh my god, hearing such a cute boy call me that makes me so happy! Sorry, Yuu-kun, but it makes me super happy!"

As he laughed, Shiina realized Nakahara was looking at him. It seemed as if he was observing Shiina acting as he never did in school. When their eyes met, Nakahara smiled gently at him.

"Well, let's have dinner. Jun-kun, are there any foods you don't like?" Mami stood up, and her round belly looked painfully heavy.

Forgetting Nakahara was right there, Shiina stood up protectively. He looked at her as she walked to the kitchen with a worried expression on his face.

"Um, no, there's none," he answered.

"What a good boy! Even though Yuu-kun's a teacher he's so picky! I wish he would learn from students like you!" Mami began to teeter towards the kitchen, looking off-balance.

"Let me help you!" he offered.

Turning around, Mami looked up at his face, and she burst out laughing. "You look really worried! But pregnant women can do household chores with no problem. Without some kind of moderate exercise, you'll get unnecessarily fat. Hey, I'm okay, so sit back down. If a cool guy like you is beside me all the time, I might faint!" she said, turning him down gently.

Shiina sat back down on the sofa dejectedly. He

exchanged glances with Nakahara, who looked at him admiringly.

"Shiina, I had no idea you were so kind," said his teacher. "You're really good at taking care of people. You always act so cold in class, I can't believe it."

Shiina regretted showing his true nature, but since it was in front of Nakahara he felt a little relieved. Nakahara wouldn't act like Sasagawa who would act violently and then try to lick his wounds.

He looked away, and put both hands on his knees. "Really? No one's ever said I'm kind or that I'm good at taking care of people, so I don't know."

"Well, you have a little brother, right? It's probably from that," Nakahara said in a convincing voice.

This made Shiina think back to when Hayato was small. He was a troublesome child, and would cry all night long. Shiina remembered that his mother had had her hands full with his little brother. She couldn't even take her eyes off him until he could walk. You never knew what he would do. His family had fussed over him at every step in his development.

And now, he would avoid Shiina and talk to him so hatefully. Hayato neglected him, shunned him. However, Shiina felt protective of Mami, and also of younger people. He felt a sense of guardianship. If he couldn't get anything he wanted, he at least wanted other people to be satisfied. If that was because of Hayato, it was ironic.

The food Mami made was indeed delicious, just as Nakahara had said. After that, Shiina took a bath, and

thanked Mami, who was knitting in the living room. It seemed Nakahara had already gone to bed, as Shiina didn't see him anywhere.

Shiina bid Mami good night and was about to leave when Mami said, "Do you have any dirty clothes?"

Shiina didn't know if she meant he should do it himself, or what.

"Oh, I always do mine at the Laundromat..." he said without thinking.

"Always?" Mami made a strange face, and looked up at Shiina.

He gave a vague smile and smoothed things over with a laugh. "Oh, my laundry tends to pile up..." As soon as he said it, he felt guilty. Mami and Nakahara trusted him, and were letting him stay at their house, yet he had told a stupid lie like that.

"Well then let's do it before it piles up. Hand it over." Her feminine hand beckoned him to hand over the clothes he held. The wedding ring she wore on her left hand sparkled under the lights.

He couldn't let Nakahara's wife do such a thing. Shiina tried to refuse, and said, "No, it's okay, I'll do it."

"Don't worry about it! It's totally automatic, you know. Your clothes don't add much more to what we already have. Oh! Or are you embarrassed for me to see your underwear?" She was beautiful even with no makeup on.

"No, that's not it," Shiina protested.

"Then give it!" She seized the opportunity and

snatched the clothes from his hands. She grumbled and started to walk towards the bathroom.

Shiina earnestly called from behind her, "Thanks, Mami-chan!"

With her long, curly hair flowing behind her, Mami suddenly turned her head. "Whoa. You just made my heart stop," she said with a serious face. Then she smiled kindly.

Shiina smiled, and watched her walk off.

The leaves of the row of Gingko trees he could see from the classroom window were in the midst of turning red. The baseball team passed through them wearing their white uniforms. Shiina saw other students walking around campus, getting ready to go home. He saw the track team on the ground. Placing his hand on the window frame, he bent over. He was killing time gazing out the window. Even taking into account the time it would take to go home and change, it was still too early to go to work.

The clear sky looked so high. It was a clear, pleasant autumn day. He suddenly couldn't believe he was standing there appreciating the changing of the seasons. After his first day of work, he had been exhausted. He'd gone back to Nakahara's house. Mami had been waiting for him, and she listened to him with interest as he told her all about his day. He thought to himself that that was how a family should feel. A warm feeling had begun to well up inside of him, and he had fallen fast asleep on the futon that smelled like it had

been outside in the sun.

But now he felt that he was just a burden to the Nakahara family, that everything was just a game of make-believe. Every time they were kind to him, he got more depressed.

"What do I want, anyway?" he whispered to himself as he watched the couples pass by below. Did he long for the warmth of a family like theirs? Or did he want to go back to his real family, even though they were cold? Or did he just want someone to love him like Nakahara loved Mami? He didn't have anything, so he didn't even know which one he wanted. He let out a long sigh, and as he turned around in the empty classroom he saw that he was not alone.

Sasagawa stood leaning against the entryway by the podium.

"You should have come to my place," he said. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he gazed at Shiina without blinking. His black hair was combed back, and the sun that filtered in from the hallway made his coat a glaring white color.

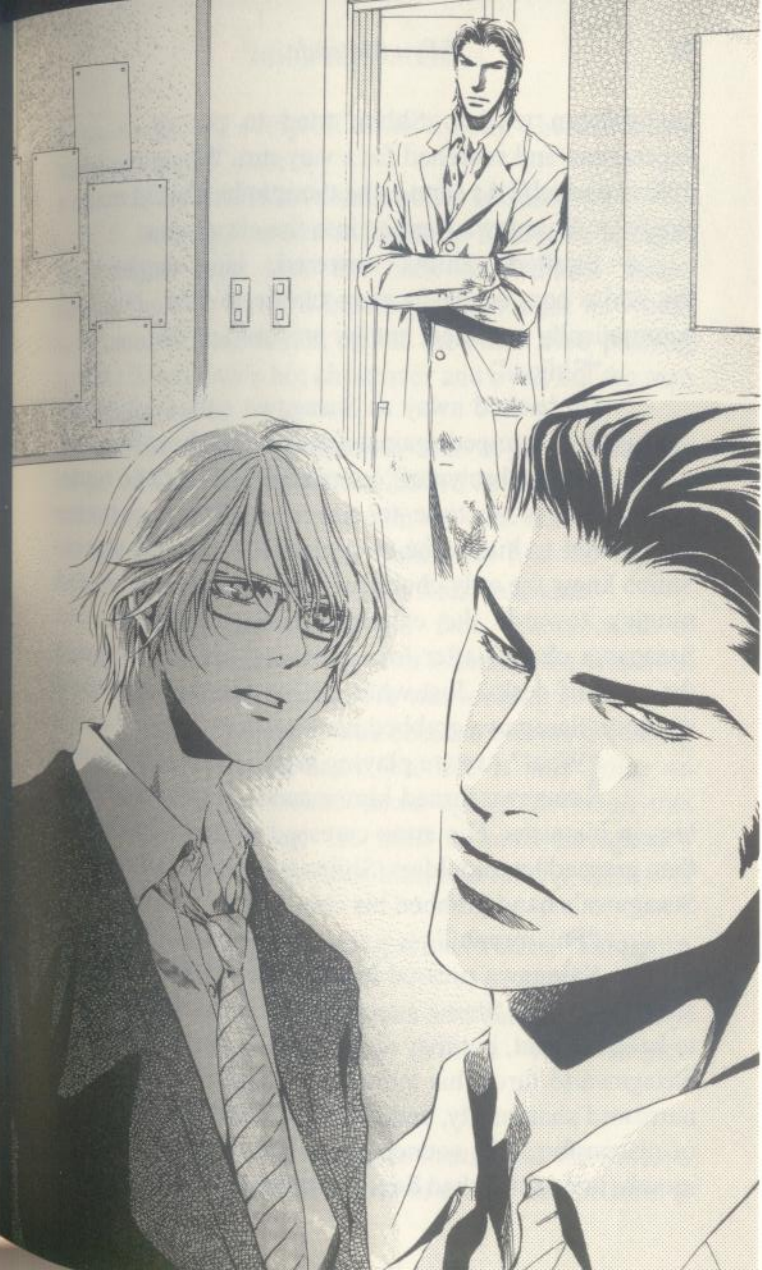
"What?" Shiina asked with a suspicious look on his face.

"You're staying with Nakahara, right?"

"Oh, yeah, that's what happened."

Sasagawa uncrossed his arms. Shiina sensed a dangerous feeling, and quickly moved away from the window. If he was cornered, there was no telling what Sasagawa would do.

Even though Sasagawa knew he was his student, he had still forced him to do such a terrible thing. What



an inhuman teacher. Shiina tried to put on a calm expression, and searched for a way out. Where could he defend himself? As soon as he thought he should make a run for it, Sasagawa stepped into the classroom.

Startled, Shiina cowered. He watched as the white coat made its way closer to him. His legs automatically retreated, and he prepared to flee.

"Shiina."

He backed away as Sasagawa called his name, and his thigh bumped against a desk beside him. Because of that, he was thrown off course from his escape route, and there was no time to correct it. Sasagawa came even closer to him as he struggled to regain his stance. Shiina knew the only choice was to run away. He started running towards the entrance to the classroom, but Sasagawa chased after him, weaving his way through the rows of desks. Just when Shiina was almost out of the door, Sasagawa grabbed his arm.

"What? Are we playing tag?" Shiina spat out.

Sasagawa turned him around roughly, and took him in his arms. His arms caressed Shiina's back, and then grasped his shoulders. Shiina tried to look away, but Sasagawa's hand grabbed his chin.

"Fu...mmph!"

Sasagawa pressed his lips against Shiina's over and over again. Shiina's teeth should have been closed to keep him out, but they automatically parted, allowing Sasagawa to thrust his tongue in roughly. Shiina's eyes narrowed shamefully, and his chest filled with a feeling of discomfort. Wet sounds came from the inside of his mouth, just as they had done the other night. Sasagawa's

tongue explored every bit of his mouth. That technique hadn't changed, either.

Why did he love such pushy kisses?

Putting pressure on his body, Sasagawa plunged his tongue deep into the back of Shiina's throat. Shiina found it hard to breathe, and thought he would suffocate. He scrunched up his face and tried pushing against Sasagawa's hot chest over and over, but the man wouldn't give in.

He felt overwhelmed, and at last, Sasagawa let go of him. Dazed, Shiina looked as if he was about to collapse. Sasagawa held him up with his arm. Even though he didn't want to, Shiina let him do this to recover his footing. He hung his head in shame.

He slowly raised his face and looked at Sasagawa's own face. Sasagawa's expression was both masculine and affectionate. He was looking at him with a steady gaze. Perhaps it was because he was breathing heavily, but Shiina's heart felt like it was going to burst. Panting, he looked down again. He hated this uncomfortable feeling. He tried to push Sasagawa's hand away to get away from him, and luckily there was no objection.

"You stopped looking at me in class," Sasagawa teased.

Shiina looked up at him and said sarcastically, "Yeah, because some guy had a very strange misunderstanding."

"Hmmm?"

Sasagawa shoved both hands into the pockets of his white coat and sat on top of a desk behind him. It

looked like he was going to stay there.

"That's all. I don't have anything else to say to you," Shiina said, glaring at him.

However, that didn't erase the smile that was plastered on Sasagawa's face. "I told you before that if you were lonely, you could rely on me," he said. "I was worried whether or not you're seriously considering it."

Shiina looked away from Sasagawa's strong gaze.

Sasagawa had said the same thing again, so maybe he was serious? His expression was unusually sincere, and Shiina didn't see any hint of a joke or lies. He didn't know how to act. Should he ignore it? There was a part of him that wanted to rely on Sasagawa if it meant escaping from the darkness inside of him. But the arms that were stretched out in front of him also had a definite sense of danger. Also, when Nakahara or Mami treated him so nicely, he would distance himself from them, so there wasn't a high chance that he could trust Sasagawa, who was so harsh. He would just become an object of pity.

"No matter how lonely I get, I will never rely on you," he said in a contemptuous yet weak voice.

Sasagawa's eyes narrowed. "Why not?"

"Because I can't trust you."

"Why not?" Sasagawa demanded again, roughly.

Shiina figured that no matter how he answered, Sasagawa wouldn't be satisfied. Not until Shiina nodded his head and agreed to his proposal.

"Why don't you think long and hard about it?"

Shiina said sarcastically. "If you have any conscience or morals left, I think you'll know why."

Sasagawa stood from the desk with a clatter and said, "It's *because* I have a conscience that I can't leave you alone." He walked closer and stood before Shiina. He continued in a low voice, "I understand what it's like to not fit in. But unlike you, I didn't grow up being overly sensitive. That's how I can survive."

Shiina silently averted his eyes from Sasagawa. If the man didn't care to hear his opinion, it wouldn't matter how he reacted, anyway. That was how stubborn he was.

Sasagawa's eyes were sincere. Shiina felt both his sense of danger and his attractiveness at once.

"The kind of loneliness you feel can only be filled in by one thing," said Sasagawa. "But if it's not something that can be found in one day, then you have to work to get it, right? The more you try to hide your pain, the harder it is for me to watch you."

"So in other words, you pity me?" Shiina asked coldly.

Sasagawa crossed his arms and looked down at him, laughing. "Do you think I would pity you? I'm not that nice of a guy. I've been your teacher since spring, right? As I kept thinking of a reason why my eyes always wandered towards you, I finally realized it. Unlike other students, I feel something special towards you," he said, as if he was talking to himself.

Shiina looked at him, trying to decide whether he was telling the truth or not. He sighed deeply. Just when he thought Sasagawa was done teasing him, this

time he was trying to win him over?

Realizing that Sasagawa's words had swayed his heart a little, he scoffed and looked down. If he believed everything this guy said, it would be his loss.

"So you want to help me out? You're pretty full of yourself, huh? I don't think you have that kind of power," he said grimly.

But Sasagawa didn't give up that easily. "Even if I don't have that power, I have arms that can hold you," he declared seriously.

"That's not enough," Shiina said stubbornly.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa quieted his student by calling his name. His arresting gaze seemed strangely hot, stifling. This kind of atmosphere between a teacher and a student was definitely strange.

Shiina was confused. "Are you trying to tell me you love me, and you'll do anything for me? That's a lie. You just want to do whatever weird shit you want to me. It's ridiculous. Will you just leave me alone? You're a teacher, don't you have better things to do?"

Sasagawa was quiet for a while. He looked away. Then he said, "I was waiting for you that night. Since you got out of that silver Mercedes."

Why was he telling Shiina the truth now? Shiina glared at him. Sasagawa's words repeated in his head over and over again.

Chapter 5

The cake shop was open until eight in the evening, so Shiina usually didn't get back to Nakahara's house until almost nine. He walked up the gray stairs and rang the doorbell of the apartment. From inside came Mami's cheerful voice. She opened the door. "Jun-kun, welcome home!"

"I'm back!" Even if this was a fake family, her genuine smile made him truly happy. "Oh, Mami-chan, this is from the owner."

The sweets from his job were locally famous. Since there were so many kinds, there were often leftovers, and the owner allowed the employees to take them home. Mami exclaimed happily and took the small white box from Shiina's hands. This was the second time he had brought some home, yet she was still as happy as she had been the first time.

The three of them sat around the dining room table. Mami had already eaten, so she started to dig into the cake, and Nakahara was enjoying an after-dinner drink. They sat with Shiina as he ate dinner.

It had been four days since he had been staying with them, but this was the first time Nakahara was here at this time. According to Mami, club advisors got to

come home around seven.

"Sensei, don't you have to do hyena extermination at the train station?" Shiina asked as he raised a spoonful of chicken stew to his mouth.

"Hyena extermination? What's that?" Nakahara asked blankly.

Shiina tried to explain. "Well, I heard the male teachers were taking turns watching out for thieves at the train station."

"What kind of school would do that? Whoever it is sure has guts. Every time I see those guys, I get seized with fear and I want to run away!" Nakahara said with a self-deprecating smile.

Shiina lowered his voice and asked, "So what about our school?"

"I don't think so," Nakahara replied. "But the only one who'd be able to take on those hyenas is probably Sasagawa, don't you think so? He used to be a total delinquent, or so I hear. Every time we go out drinking with co-workers, some yakuza always comes up and talks to him. Scary, huh?" he asked with a laugh.

"Really..."

Shiina gave a faint smile and acted like he was looking at the plates lined up on the table. A dark feeling of unrest began to well up inside his chest. That story Sasagawa told him the other day at the train station had been a complete lie. He hadn't been there to drive away hyenas. Just as he said after school the other day, he had been waiting for Shiina all along. And since he even knew the color of the Mercedes, he must have been there for a while.

Shiina had contacted Kanako right after school, so maybe Sasagawa had overheard their conversation somehow. Shiina froze at the thought of Sasagawa's overpowering desire. His body stiffened at the dinner table. Even though Sasagawa wasn't there, it felt as if he was being caressed by an invisible hand. He shivered.

"Jun-kun?" Mami raised a forkful of icing to her lips and looked at him strangely.

"Hmm?" He smiled, returning her glance.

He didn't want to feel like this. He wanted to forget about what had happened. Behind his cheerful smile, he was lamenting. The heat he had forgotten slowly began to throb and ache inside the places Sasagawa had been.

Shiina put on his cardigan over his freshly pressed shirt, and said to Mami, "I'm leaving now!"

"Okay, be careful!" She waved cheerfully. Her stomach pushed out from her ankle-length dress. Even though her baby wouldn't appreciate it much, Shiina wished that these days could continue forever.

Just as he reached the first floor, he stopped and hurriedly retraced his steps. He had forgotten his math review sheet and his textbook.

"I'm sorry, I forgot something!" Panting, he pushed open the door and saw Mami still standing in the entryway, with a dumbfounded look on her face. Her eyes were wide like a doll's, unblinking. Something was clearly wrong.

"Mami-chan?" Shiina looked down and saw a

puddle of water around Mami's feet.

"Oh, no. My water broke," she whispered.

Nakahara expressed his thanks in a relieved voice. "I'm so glad you were there with her! I guess she didn't expect her water to break like that. I had told her that if that happened to call the hospital, but I guess she panicked. I'm glad she wasn't alone!"

There were only a few people in the staff room at lunch, but no one else was around Nakahara's window-side desk besides him and Shiina.

After he had found Mami like that, Shiina remembered that the number of the hospital was posted on a bulletin board in the living room, and called them right away. He asked to speak to a nurse and handed the phone to Mami. There was no sign of her usual cheerful disposition. She was probably in shock. That's why Shiina had to help her. She was so helpless that he accompanied her to the hospital and didn't leave until Nakahara showed up.

"Don't worry about it. Are Mami-chan and the baby okay?" Shiina asked worriedly.

Nakahara smiled. "Yes, it's a healthy baby girl."

He opened his cellphone and showed a picture of Mami holding a small baby and making a peace sign. Seeing her cheerful, kind smile, Shiina was instantly relieved. As he looked at the picture, Nakahara began to have a regretful look on his face. He put his elbows on the desk, changing positions. His chair creaked loudly.

"So anyway, I'm really sorry, but Mami has to be in the hospital for a while. I'm going to stay with my parents at their house nearby. But about you..."

"Yes?" Shiina burned the image of Mami's smile into his mind. He didn't know if he'd ever see it again. He returned the phone to Nakahara. He sensed his teacher had already made plans for him.

"Well, I was agonizing over what to do while I was in the staff room when Sasagawa offered to help," Nakahara said. "He lives in an apartment by himself, and he said he'd be happy for you to stay with him."

"What?" Shiina exclaimed in disbelief. The nearby students and teachers turned around, surprised. "No, I can manage on my own somehow. Anyway, my parents will be home in a few days, and I can stay in a hotel, so please don't make me go to Sasagawa-sensei's house. He doesn't like me, and if I go to his house who knows what he'll do to me!" Shiina pleaded desperately.

Deep wrinkles formed in the corners of Nakahara's eyes. "That's ridiculous."

"But you told me yourself that he was dangerous, didn't you?" Shiina said.

Just as he thought he should probably not talk about such a thing so loudly, he was interrupted by another voice.

"Shiina."

Right in front of his eyes, standing beside Nakahara was Sasagawa, wearing his filthy white coat as always. When their eyes met, Sasagawa sneered at him. Shiina glared back sullenly.

Nakahara turned to Sasagawa and smiled cheerfully. "Sasagawa! Thanks so much. Please take care of him."

"Sure thing," Sasagawa agreed, trying to act like he was a nice person. The serious Nakahara didn't see through his co-worker's behavior.

Staying at Sasagawa's house meant only one thing.

Shiina impatiently raised his voice. "Give me back the 10,000 yen you took from me. Then I'll be able to stay in a hotel." He stretched out his hands.

"What are you talking about?" Nakahara asked, clueless. He looked at Shiina, and then at Sasagawa.

Sasagawa tilted his head, and put one hand on his chin. "I have no idea," he said flatly.

Shiina couldn't miss the sneer that was pulling up at the corners of his mouth.

Probably because he was worried about Mami, Nakahara left the classroom as soon as homeroom ended. And with that, the last person who would lend Shiina any money disappeared. Sasagawa told Shiina he would go home with him and not to leave without him, but Shiina ignored this and went back to Nakahara's apartment. He used a spare key Nakahara had given him and gathered up the few belongings he had there. He gazed around the living room and was seized by melancholy. Even though he was just a freeloader, they had both treated him so nicely. Even though he knew he couldn't stay there forever, he felt sad that he couldn't thank them properly.

Those calm days had now passed, and what was most painful was that he had started to trust them.

He wouldn't be able to go there again. But there was nothing he could do about it. It was definitely comfortable there, but he didn't belong there, either.

He scolded his weak self, and closed the front door behind him.

He didn't have enough courage to ask for a loan from the job he had only just started, so he left on time as usual. It was dark, and the cold evening wind chilled him to the bone. Save for his cardigan, he had nothing else to stave off the cold. He thrust both hands deep into his pockets, and tried to brace himself against the wind. At any rate, he started to head for the nearest train station. It was a different one from the one the hyenas frequented. It was a small, mostly abandoned station that students from Futaba High School used. Because of this the buildings there were small and simple, so there was really no place for him to sleep. If he did fall asleep, he was sure to get sick. It didn't look like he could stay there, either.

Walking back up the road he had just come down from, he pondered where to go. Where else *could* he go? He wasn't familiar with this area. It didn't look like there were houses or parks close by. He walked aimlessly down the road, and an unreasonable anger towards Sasagawa began to well up inside of him. Why didn't Sasagawa stop him when he saw Shiina walk away after school? Shiina couldn't stay with the man who had raped him. But even still, Sasagawa hadn't contacted him at all. Even though Sasagawa had stubbornly told

Shiina he could rely on him, Shiina couldn't believe his teacher wouldn't be worried about where he was.

Shiina wanted to complain about this terrible situation. He took out his cellphone from his pocket. If Sasagawa answered, Shiina would cuss him out and then hang up the phone. He stared at the screen of his phone and saw Sasagawa's number that Nakahara had forced him to enter.

When he answered the phone, Sasagawa said in an annoyed voice that he wouldn't have been able to reach Shiina even if he wanted to because he didn't know Shiina's number. He impatiently asked where Shiina was, and within a few minutes he showed up at the station. He drove his pearl-white Nissan van to the side of the road recklessly, and got out from the driver's side.

He was wearing clothes that looked nothing like what he wore at school. He wore a black warm-up jersey suit over a white T-shirt, with Nike shoes. He was definitely dressed casually, but there was something charming yet low-bred about it. Shiina stared at him silently and waited for him on the road.

"You probably haven't eaten. What do you want?" was the first thing Sasagawa asked.

Shiina wondered if Sasagawa had eaten yet. He couldn't tell from his voice. Maybe he hadn't yet because he was waiting for him.

"I don't care," Shiina said softly, looking down at his sneakers as he walked along the black asphalt. If

he didn't want to sleep at Sasagawa's, why didn't he run away after he hung up the phone? It was his own fault. He stood there because he had already been prepared for Sasagawa to have sex with him. It made him think back to that night. His hungry body had accepted Sasagawa. He remembered how it felt when Sasagawa had been inside him. He nervously kept his face stiff.

But Sasagawa talked as if everything was normal. "There's a family restaurant nearby here, is that okay?" He met Shiina's eyes briefly, and was startled by the look in them.

Shiina didn't know whether or not Sasagawa had sensed what he was thinking about. He struggled to maintain a poker face, and said, "Okay, but I'm still wearing my school uniform..." He decided to not finish his sentence with "and if we both go there and eat together, won't that attract too much attention?" He remembered that Sasagawa was the kind of man who didn't care one bit what others thought of him.

"What?" Both of Sasagawa's hands were stuffed into his jersey, and he looked like he thought he was being made fun of.

Not wanting to be bothered about every little thing, Shiina shut his mouth. They ended up eating at the restaurant after all, with Shiina still in his school uniform. People stared at them, definitely not thinking they were a teacher and a student. As they entered the shop, the atmosphere changed. All the men there looked jealous, and all the women looked flirty. All their eyes were on Sasagawa. Even the waitress who came to their table seemed mesmerized by him.

"Um, as soon as you decide what you want to order, please press this button," the young girl said as she stared at them. She was obviously trying to figure out their relationship.

"Okay," Sasagawa replied, not taking his eyes off the menu. The girl bowed awkwardly and returned to the counter.

"Looks like you're popular, Sensei," Shiina said as he looked around the restaurant.

Still not looking up, Sasagawa said arrogantly and without a hint of laughter, "Yeah, well, I've never heard any complaints." He closed the menu loudly.

"Really," Shiina said with a bored look on his face.

Seeing this, Sasagawa started to talk in a nasty tone. "No one likes me at school, but you're pretty popular aren't you? Just the other day you got confessed to, huh?"

Shiina returned his gaze to Sasagawa. He saw that the teacher had a sneer on his face, and was basically acting like the confession that happened at school was make-believe. Shiina said coldly, "Yeah... but they're not serious. Compared to them, your motive was much clearer, Sensei."

"Motive?" Sasagawa repeated, as he rummaged around in his jersey pockets, and pulled something out.

Shiina watched as a pack of Mild Seven cigarettes and a cheap-looking lighter were set on the table, and then shifted his gaze back to Sasagawa. "That waitress girl, the girls who are sitting next to us...they all looked at you pretty suggestively," he said.

"Ha ha!" Sasagawa tapped the edge of the box lightly and put a cigarette in his mouth, smiling. He had probably noticed the women's gazes as well. If he was the kind of person that could pick up on that, he could make any woman he wanted to fall for him.

Shiina looked to the side with an amazed expression on his face, and rested his chin in his hands. "If you're so popular, why do you want me?" he spat out.

"What I want to know is why don't you want girls your own age? You're sleeping with some older lady, aren't you? Is it for the profit?" Sasagawa interrupted.

Shiina closed his mouth and glared, but Sasagawa was already looking down at his lit cigarette which he had set down in the ashtray.

"Yeah, profit," Shiina repeated, thinking up an excuse. After he had slept with a woman like Kanako he had had no interest in girls his own age. That seemed like the most fitting answer.

"Oh, okay. I got it. I see," Sasagawa mocked.

Shiina remained quiet, and Sasagawa leaned back in his chair, smoking his cigarette. He gazed at Shiina with purposeful, scrutinizing eyes.

Shiina didn't like this atmosphere. He looked up and pestered Sasagawa to continue. "What? Spit it out!"

"You want me to say it even if it'll hurt you?" Sasagawa asked.

"I won't be hurt by anything you have to say," Shiina shot back.

Sasagawa looked at Shiina briefly and then shifted his gaze downward. He held his cigarette between his fingers and said, with a smile on his face, "You have an Oedipus complex."

The muscles in Shiina's face contracted at these unexpected words.

"Are you making fun of me? I have no idea what you're talking about. I hate my family!" he denied coldly, but Sasagawa didn't withdraw. He wondered if Sasagawa was going to ask why he hated his family.

"In the place of your mother, do you have that lady hold you when you're naked? Or do you like being held down and yelled at? Either way, it's not good," Sasagawa said, laughing.

For a moment, Shiina's face revealed that Sasagawa had seen right through him. He twisted his expression to show contempt. Was this for revenge because Sasagawa wanted him and couldn't have him? Right in the middle of a conversation his teacher had gone deep into Shiina's heart, and dug out the darkest secret that he had been trying so hard to hide. Sasagawa had pulled it up and exposed it like this. Shiina couldn't forgive such terrible actions. The displeasure in his chest began to well up more and more.

He hissed in a low voice, "I told you, you're wrong."

"Which part?" Sasagawa retorted. "Explain it to me so I can understand."

The white smoke he exhaled drifted throughout the air. Sasagawa's face showed that he was enjoying what was happening. He was trying to provoke Shiina.

If Shiina let Sasagawa get to him, he'd just get hurt even more. Shiina bore it silently, squeezing the fists that rested on top of his knees, trying to get away from this sense of danger.

Sasagawa looked at him straight-on, and said, "At your age you can only screw old ladies, huh? It's so pathetic it makes me laugh."

Shiina's fingers grabbed at his slacks and trembled. Why did Sasagawa have to say such things to him? Despite his cool face, anger welled up inside him. He turned his gaze back to Sasagawa. The man wasn't even worth talking to. "I'm leaving," he said coldly.

"To where?" Sasagawa said, laughing.

It was so unpleasant-sounding that Shiina wanted to cover up his ears. Hatred spread over his beautiful face.

"A place where I don't have to see you!" he said, standing up and slamming his hands on the table.

Sasagawa placed one of his hands over Shiina's, staring at the surprised look on Shiina's face.

"You've been alone for so long," Sasagawa observed. "You don't have anywhere to go to. Don't push yourself. Anyway, Nakahara asked me to look out for you. At my place I have food, a bathtub, and sex. What else could you want?"

He was stubborn right until the end, which pissed Shiina off even further. No matter how much Shiina tried to pull his hand away, it was useless. Irritated, he could sense that Sasagawa was enjoying this situation more and more.

"There are plenty of places that are open for

twenty-four hours. I'll kill time there. I don't need you," Shiina said indifferently with a scowl on his face. He was trying his hardest to restrain his anger.

However, Sasagawa crushed his plans by saying firmly, "I don't care if you need me or not. But no matter what, I'm bringing you to my apartment." He calmly put out his half-smoked cigarette in the ashtray. Shiina was silent, and Sasagawa finally looked at him. He told Shiina with his eyes that he wouldn't let Shiina get away.

"Let me," Sasagawa ordered in a low voice.

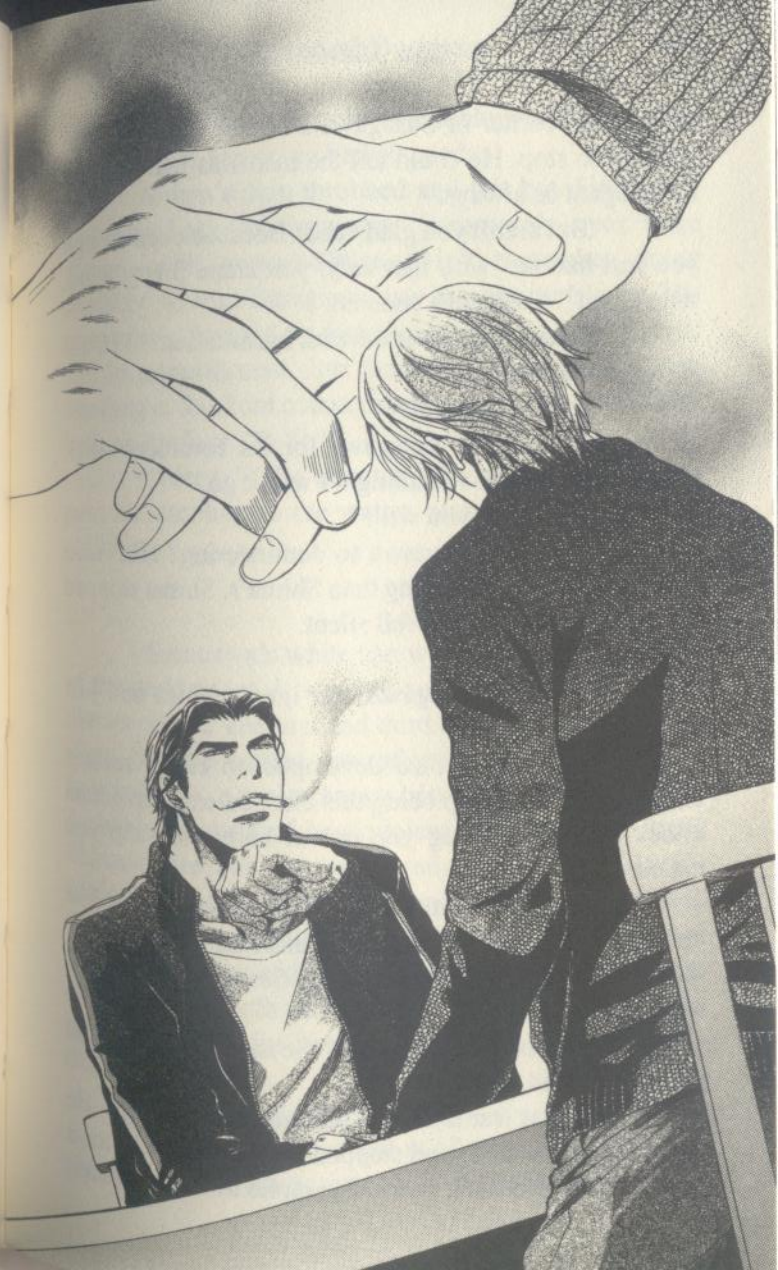
Shiina's stomach ached. He scrunched up his face and refused. "No."

"I want to!" Sasagawa insisted.

"No!" Shiina said, raising his voice. Everyone around them looked over to see what was going on. He ignored their curious glances and glared at Sasagawa.

Sasagawa took a deep breath and concentrated a sharp gaze on Shiina. He leaned back in his chair and glared at Shiina arrogantly. "I don't have a lot of chances to talk to you outside of class. No matter how foolish it was, I wanted to be close to you so I followed you. But when I saw you meeting some strange woman, I got pissed off, you know? The person I wanted so badly was right in front of me but I couldn't have him for many reasons. And I couldn't stop him from sleeping with someone else. As I watched you leaving, I became depressed. I thought that I should have raped you or done something earlier, and I regretted thinking that, but I couldn't stop myself."

"So you ambushed me. What kind of..." As



he saw the corner of Sasagawa's mouth twitch, Shiina decided to stop. He could tell the man was just going to be arrogant as always.

"But aren't you glad I did? Because even though you just had sex with that lady, you came pretty good, didn't you?" Sasagawa sneered.

Shiina's face twisted with humiliation. "I'm not going home with you."

"I'll make you."

Shiina hated Sasagawa for his confident reply. His gaze showed his loathing. "I won't go."

"I just said you will!"

Why was Sasagawa so domineering? His voice was even more overbearing than Shiina's. Shiina stopped this futile exchange and fell silent.

"Hey."

He heard Sasagawa, but ignored him and just bit his lips.

Sasagawa's voice developed an eerily serious tone to it. "If you keep being this disobedient, I'm gonna knock you down, drag you out of here and strip you naked."

So he was going to resort to violence, just like he did in the train station's bathroom. Shiina knew without looking what kind of face Sasagawa had made when he said that.

"Do whatever you want," he said scornfully, and pulled his hand away.

At that same time, Sasagawa stood up. He walked past his chair and stepped forward. A loud noise echoed throughout the room. Everyone in the restaurant

looked over at them. People were looking at Shiina's left cheek, which Sasagawa had slapped.

Shiina's skin throbbed and felt hot. He shifted his gaze back to Sasagawa. Sasagawa's eyes were shining with anger. Shiina didn't remember doing anything wrong. Sasagawa was the one to blame. His messy hair dangled on his cheeks, and he stood stock still in astonishment. Just then a waiter who had been standing at the front counter rushed over with an anxious look on his face. "S-Sir!"

"Sorry. We're leaving," Sasagawa said, but he paid no attention to the waiter, staring directly instead at Shiina.

Sasagawa's white van was parked in the middle of the parking lot. It was big and tough looking, much like its owner. The first and third rows of seats were left alone, but the second row of seats was pushed down. In that space, a moist, heavy breathing could be heard. Probably because of how violent Sasagawa had been, Shiina's thin hair was scattered in all directions. He couldn't fix his glasses, which had slipped right down to the tip of his nose. Even his cardigan and T-shirt showed proofs of cruelty with buttons ripped off. Shiina's chest was exposed. Both of his hands were above his head, tied up tightly to the head rest with his school uniform's tie.

Suppress. Reject. Struggle.

He had tried his best at all these, but it was no use. Without anything getting in the way, he could no

longer deny Sasagawa's caresses, and prepared to lose himself in it. He turned his head and exhaled gently. He saw Sasagawa kneeling before him, with his face buried between Shiina's legs. His hands gripped the back of Shiina's bare knees. He made obscene noises as he turned his head this way and that. His tongue trailed down, and he had one finger inside Shiina. He took Shiina into his mouth and handled him slowly. Unable to bear the pleasure, Shiina's legs trembled. If he moved even a little bit, the tie that bound him would cut roughly into his wrists. He had an anguished look on his face, yet his voice had a hint of pleasure in it.

"Mmnn...ahh...uh...nhhm...stop ..."

He shut his eyes and shook his head. If he didn't do that, he was scared that Sasagawa would see that his eyes were wet with passion. He already felt the scorching heat spreading throughout his body. He already knew what to search for, where the place was that gave him the most pleasure. He wouldn't dare say it out loud, but inside he was screaming for Sasagawa not to take his finger out of the place it had entered so deeply. His insides contracted and twitched from the friction. Sasagawa encouraged this and he pushed his finger deeper still into Shiina.

"Mmm...ahhh...mmm..."

Gentle tears spilled from Shiina's eyes, and he buried his face in his arm. His legs, which were bare except for his socks, crawled up the seat. At this rate he would come before he got what he really wanted. His face showed signs of uneasiness.

"No...no...stop...wait ..."

He didn't want to come yet. His eyes, wet with tears, looked at the only person who could set him free.

At this, Sasagawa stopped his movements. He looked up, taking his lips away, and pulled his finger out. He got up from the seat, and backed up from Shiina's legs. "Wanna go home?"

"What?" Shiina's wet eyes opened wide from beneath his messy hair.

"The car is too cramped for me to rape you. Let's do it in bed," Sasagawa said cruelly. He opened the side door and got into the driver's seat.

Shiina began to understand the situation. Sasagawa was going to leave him like this. Even though heat raced through his body, his mind was surprisingly cool. Sasagawa's long finger was no longer inside him. His skillful mouth wasn't sucking him off anymore. He had been tied up, so he wasn't able to masturbate, either.

Sasagawa's apartment was only about 10 minutes away from the restaurant, but that time was like hell for Shiina in the backseat of the van.

There weren't many shops open at night around this area, so there weren't a lot of people walking around. Shiina was overly nervous every time a tall truck or bus passed by the window. Even though he knew no one could see into the tinted windows from the outside, the sight of him half-naked with his legs spread out was definitely abnormal. Also, he was wet from his ass all the way to his thighs. The bulky stability of the van didn't allow Shiina to feel many of the bumps on the road, but he still felt tortured. He considered screaming

"Please do something about this!" but no words came out of his mouth. He looked down and buried his face to the side of his arm. His flushed cheeks were hot. He hated his body for the burning desire it had for Sasagawa to enter him.

Finally, he turned his eyes, which were wet with lust, to the rearview mirror.

Sasagawa was calmly smoking a cigarette. He blew the smoke out the window so it wouldn't go back to where Shiina was. The window was lowered just a little, and the cold air crept through the van. If he was being that considerate, why wouldn't he cool this heat inside Shiina? Shiina glared at Sasagawa with resentment. He saw Sasagawa glance into the mirror.

"We're almost there, hang on," Sasagawa said in a mocking tone.

Shiina felt himself grow angry, but he wouldn't admit that he also felt relieved.

A few minutes later, the van pulled into a group of apartments. Shiina could only stare at the scenery absentmindedly. Sasagawa stopped at a place that must have been the parking lot, but Shiina didn't feel that he'd be released anytime soon. Sasagawa got out of the car, opened the door and got in the back of the van. The light automatically came on, illuminating Shiina's soaking wet nether regions. Looking down, Sasagawa smiled and said, "I wondered this before, but why do you get so wet? I've never even seen a woman get as wet as you," he teased as he grabbed a box of tissues from the front seat.

"Leave me alone," Shiina whispered, and



turned his face away. At the sensation of Sasagawa's hands wiping the wetness off from between his legs, he felt a new stimulation. He had gotten soft during the car ride, but he felt himself begin to grow hard again. Shiina was confronted with even more shame. Deep inside, he began to throb. Sasagawa wiped off his head, and more transparent nectar came oozing out.

"Mmm..."

Reacting to his sigh, Sasagawa looked up. Shiina had let his guard down, and Sasagawa saw the look of pleasure on his face. He couldn't stand Sasagawa's gaze. He bit his lip roughly.

"If you can't wait until we get to the room, I can do it here," Sasagawa said, looking down at him with a humorous expression on his face.

Shiina was silent. He turned to the side, escaping Sasagawa's gaze. Sasagawa released his hands, and gathered up his underwear and slacks. Shiina's body still felt a little numb from being in that same position for so long. He thrust his hard member into his boxer briefs, and put his slacks on. His hands fumbled with the fastener, and he even put his belt on. He stood up by himself and got out of the car. He exhaled and closed his eyes. However, he didn't have the energy to stand up by himself and he had to lean against the car.

"Can you walk?" Sasagawa asked.

Shiina crossed his arms and shook his head left and right. He knew that he could either wait for the heat in his body to subside, or have it be cooled by this unjust man. He didn't want to choose so he stood frozen.

"Oh, well. Come on, then."

Sasagawa grabbed his arm and helped him walk.

"No...let go of me!" Shiina dug his heels in, but he wasn't able to compete with Sasagawa's strength.

Sasagawa brought him inside an apartment on the second floor of the building adjacent to the parking lot. Without any lights on, Shiina didn't know where to go. Finally when they entered the bedroom, there was some indirect light. He didn't have time to relax, as Sasagawa pushed him down roughly onto the double-sized bed. Both of his arms were pinned down upon the bed, and Sasagawa got on top of him. Sasagawa took off Shiina's glasses. He quickly took off his own jersey and flung it to the floor. He took off his T-shirt and revealed a well-muscled body Shiina never would have imagined was under that filthy white coat. Not only were Sasagawa's pectorals and abs clearly defined, but it was clear he worked out regularly. He probably went to a gym and drank protein shakes or something.

With that face and that body, women would eat him up. They would assume it would mean he was good at sex, and once they slept with him, they would never forget it. That's the kind of intense scent of wildness Sasagawa had about him.

"Shiina."

Hearing his name called, Shiina's gaze wavered. How were the women who would get pleasure from having sex with Sasagawa any different from him? He cleared his throat pathetically, and waited for the man in front of him. He was certain that this scorching heat could only be cooled by Sasagawa. But that's

probably what everyone thought who shared a bed with Sasagawa.

Even if he was a special person, Sasagawa might not think the same thing. Even if Sasagawa told Shiina he loved him and wanted to help him, it was probably just lip service. That is, if Sasagawa had an ulterior motive for having sex with one of his students.

If Shiina allowed himself to believe Sasagawa's sweet words and he was betrayed, he would have nothing left. He remembered the cold gazes of his family and the black darkness.

"No...no...no!"

He was seized with anxiety, and he tried to get away from Sasagawa's strong arms. But no matter how much he struggled, Sasagawa wouldn't let him go. He recklessly shook his head back and forth, and tears spilled from his eyes.

Sasagawa clicked his tongue, and grabbed Shiina's wrists, which were still red from being bound, and pinned him back down on the bed. Looking up, Shiina saw Sasagawa's sharp gaze bearing down on him.

"Don't pussy out now," Sasagawa scolded in a low voice, bringing his face close to Shiina's. His piercing eyes threatened Shiina at point-blank range. "You want me, don't you? So don't act like you're a victim here." He spread Shiina's legs with his own, and took one hand off of his. He reached into his jeans and pulled out the proof of his arousal.

"Look at it. You want this, that's why you're crying, right?" he said in a gentle, yet taunting voice. He

panted roughly with excitement.

This stirred up the lust inside Shiina once more, and self-hatred began to well up inside him again. He shook his head, denying it desperately. Seizing this opportunity, Sasagawa thrust his hot member into Shiina.

"Ah...ah...ahhh!"

A sound of pleasure and a sound of anguish mixed together. Shiina arched his back off the bed and squeezed Sasagawa's hand tightly.

After he was completely inside, Sasagawa exhaled and laughed lightly. Shiina hesitantly opened his eyes and met Sasagawa's hot gaze. Sasagawa pressed their lips together. The kiss was rough and passionate.

"Mnnm..."

Shiina moaned, his mouth full of Sasagawa's tongue. Blinking repeatedly, he remembered that his eyelashes were wet from tears.

If he hadn't called Sasagawa to tell him where he was, the person lying in bed with Sasagawa right now might not have been him. Sasagawa might have been holding someone else, moaning with someone else. Someone else's heart might have been stolen instead of his.

No matter who it was, it would have been the same. Sasagawa had decided on him, watched him. And as soon as Shiina was aware of it, it was no wonder he was now under this man's control. The bed creaked as Sasagawa sat up and took his lips away. Shiina looked up with an uneasy expression, but Sasagawa looked at him kindly.

It felt as if Shiina's heart was being crushed as a terrible pain raced through his chest. He caught his breath and looked away bitterly. If he didn't rely on something, he would never be satisfied. Sasagawa was pushing his way inside Shiina's empty, lonely heart. He didn't have enough willpower to put the brakes on this, so why was he refusing? If he opened himself up again, all he had to do was be prepared to drown.

"Ah...ahhh... ahhh..."

Matching the fast piston-like motion Sasagawa had begun, Shiina's body trembled violently. Tears rolled down his face—tears that couldn't be because of the joy of this pleasure.

"I don't know anyone else that could make such an erotic face..." Sasagawa said, sounding content. Then he tilted his head a little and smiled.

Trying to bear the pressure of Sasagawa pounding into him so hard and so deep, Shiina squeezed his hand tightly. He started panting. He felt as if those sounds were no longer coming from him. It was as if he was a bitch barking with joy from being fucked by a stud. He was merely an animal.

He lifted his chin and called out, "Nnn...ahhh...h aaa...Sensei...Sensei..."

He gave himself up to the vibrations, and this made Sasagawa pound into him even harder. He put more of his weight on Shiina's hand that he pressed down on the bed, and as he roughly pulled out and pushed back in, sometimes a low moan would escape from his lips. Hearing this, Shiina was so aroused he couldn't take it anymore. They were both acting so filthy, the pleasure



he got became the real thing.

The sounds of their panting were animalistic. The wet sound of them being joined together mixed with Shiina's passionate moans, and the temperature in the room seemed to rise.

"Ahh...ahh...ahhh! Ahhh!"

He unabashedly raised his voice, and arched his flushed body. His soft, ash-brown hair was disheveled and clung to his wet cheeks. Sasagawa sat up straighter so he could enter him deeper. When he did this, he let go of Shiina's hand, but Shiina pleaded through tears not to let go. Sasagawa's fingers entwined again with his and squeezed his hand tightly.

"No matter what happens, I'll never abandon you. I want every part of you, no matter how dirty or weak it is. Because I love every part of you," Sasagawa said between thrusts, and his words sounded serious and genuine.

Shiina opened his eyes.

The savior that was going to rescue him from his lonely darkness had appeared before his eyes. Sasagawa's chest was sweaty. His black hair fell messily onto his forehead with a masculine sensuality. Everything about him overwhelmed Shiina. And if you added the sense of danger to that, it felt as if Sasagawa would take him to some place different.

Was it a way out or a new world of hope? He wasn't sure yet. But if he could make it come true, he would wish for Sasagawa to never let go of his hand.

Sasagawa's thrusts started getting shorter, and the way his hardness pounded into Shiina brought him

close to climax. Shiina couldn't help but make one more animalistic sound and cried, "Sen...sei!" The feeling in his stomach had been waiting for that moment. From between his trembling legs shot out a warm liquid. His plentiful, thick semen poured out onto his stomach. A little bit later, Sasagawa plunged harder into Shiina's tight hole and flooded it with a warm liquid. That liquid was proof that Sasagawa had reached his climax.

Shiina panted, intoxicated by the slippery feeling inside of him.

"Shiina."

Their eyes met. The feeling of the overwhelming pleasure after he had come, the feeling of satisfaction... Shiina had never experienced anything like it before. It was deeper than anything he had felt before. His eyelids felt heavy and he couldn't keep his gaze on Sasagawa for long. Gasping, he looked back down. His hair was wet with sweat so Sasagawa gently pushed it out of his eyes for him.

"Don't forget. I'm the only one who understands you." The voice that whispered into his ear had no trace of pushiness left in it.

Washed away by the pleasure of sex, Shiina lost himself to Sasagawa's strong will. He wanted to feel badly about it, but it wouldn't do any good. Shiina's head was against Sasagawa's elbow. Light kisses fell on his lips. As the pressure of them increased, he felt Sasagawa's member, which was still inside him, start to quiver. Shiina clung to Sasagawa's neck. They had sex a second time, and by the time their bodies begged for a third time, Shiina was exhausted. They made love for

hours, and his body became Sasagawa's possession. He thought he might as well give Sasagawa his heart, too. It was a temptation that welled up inside him, and he couldn't shake it off.

Eventually, Shiina fell fast asleep. When he woke up, he looked around him. The sunlight that filtered through the curtains was gentle. It must have been early in the morning. The room was still dim.

Raising his head, Sasagawa's arm, which had been holding on to him, fell limply to the bed. Shiina figured they had fallen asleep that way. They were both completely naked, but he wasn't sure if he had fallen asleep or passed out. However, it was clear that at some point Sasagawa had cleaned him up. There was no remainder of the uncomfortable stickiness from before. Propping himself up on one elbow, he touched Sasagawa's shoulder gently. He stared.

During sex Sasagawa was rough and wild, but his sleeping face looked so childish. Shiina tried to get up, but Sasagawa grasped his arm, half-asleep.

"Mnnn..."

Sasagawa's unconscious mumbles seemed to be scolding him not to let go. He pressed himself against Sasagawa's warm skin.

Chapter 6

"...and that's how you solve that one. Okay, on to the next problem."

A-hem!

Shiina awoke with a start from the cute sound of a girl clearing her throat. It seemed he had fallen asleep. His left arm had been stretched out on top of his desk, but his head had been resting on his right arm, which was now asleep. He pulled both arms toward himself and raised himself up on his desk on top of his textbook, which was still opened.

He nodded to Ai, who was sitting next to him, and turned his listless gaze to the podium. Sasagawa was standing there with his white coat on, and it seemed he was searching the room, about to call on someone. Their eyes met, and Sasagawa smiled arrogantly. They had been together until just this morning.

And whose fault is it that I'm so sleepy? Shiina thought as he got goosebumps.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa's clear voice echoed throughout the classroom. Shiina slumped his shoulders and hung his head. He had been sleeping this whole time, so there was no way he'd be able to solve the problem. He didn't even

know which problem they were on, for that matter.

Shiina stood up from his chair with a clatter, and said softly, "I'm sorry, I don't know."

"What part don't you know?" Sasagawa said coldly, holding his textbook with one hand.

Shiina fell silent, and then he sensed someone else staring at him. It was Ai. She was sneakily giving him her notebook. Shiina took one look at it and turned back towards Sasagawa.

"2X-1," he said promptly.

"Well, your answer is right, but how did you solve it?" Sasagawa never asked questions with this much detail. He was purposefully being a bully. "You don't know, huh? Because you were sleeping. All right. Nishida-san, if you could tell him the correct answer, then obviously you know how to solve it. Go up to the chalkboard and write the formula."

"Okaaaay...." Ai stood up with an unpleasant look on her face.

Shiina threw a glance at Sasagawa, and then whispered, "I'm sorry, Nishida-san."

With a charmed look on her face, Ai nervously shook her head as if to say, "That's okay."

Above them, Sasagawa was watching their exchange from the podium with a sharp look on his face.

When math class was finally over, it was time for lunch. Before heading to the rooftop, Shiina needed to buy lunch. He stood up and left the noisy classroom.

A group of students had gathered in the purchase line at the cafeteria. As soon as the middle-aged lunch

lady saw Shiina, she knew exactly what he wanted. She handed it to him immediately. Normally a male student wouldn't like this kind of special treatment, but compared to how the other girls treated him, he was fine with her good will. He took his wallet from the pocket of his slacks. He innocently opened it and couldn't believe his eyes when he saw there was barely any money left in it.

Yesterday he had had at least a few thousand yen in his wallet. However, now he was only left with four or five coins! He took all of them out, and they didn't even add up to 100 yen. He closed the wallet's change compartment.

"...He got me."

That morning he'd told Sasagawa that he didn't need any money when the man had tried to offer some. He'd told him he would pay for his own lunch, and he could manage with the money he had on hand. Apparently Sasagawa had taken the money as soon as Shiina had left the room. In other words, he wanted Shiina to rely on him for money, also.

Shiina had no choice but to leave the purchase line. He sighed, and made his way to the staff room. He passed through the open door. Steel desks were arranged in a U-shape around the principal's desk. He saw a few students and teachers around, but he didn't see that filthy white coat. "Excuse me. Have you seen Sasagawa-sensei?" he asked the music teacher, who was sitting closest to the door.

She was a young, pretty woman, and she smiled kindly. "I haven't. Maybe he's in the math lab?" She said

"math lab," but that room was more like a storeroom. Various teaching materials and other things were kept there. Since it was a fairly private room, it was often where they would have individual parent-teacher conferences.

It was on the third floor of the north part of the school building. The landing in front of it was the one where Morishita had confessed to Shiina, so Sasagawa had probably been in the math lab then, too. The staff room was on the first floor of the south part of the building. It was a pain to walk all the way to the lab, and by the time he'd get back there wouldn't be much time at all to buy lunch.

"What about Nakahara-sensei?" Shiina asked, looking at the music teacher with pleading eyes. Nakahara was his last hope.

"Oh, Nahakara-sensei always goes to the hospital during lunch. He wants to see his wife and his baby daughter, so he leaves right away," the music teacher giggled.

Just as Shiina had feared, he had to go all the way to the math lab.

Who cares about lunch, at this rate I won't even be able to afford to go to work!

Shiina left the staff room with sluggish steps and headed towards the north side of the building. He dragged his feet, tired from the lack of sleep and the sex he had had all night. He finally made it up to the dim third floor. If Sasagawa wasn't there, he would be really angry. He made a bitter face and opened the door to the math lab without knocking.

"I've been waiting for you."

Sasagawa looked at Shiina with a smirk as he stood in front of the curtains which were yellowed from the sun. He sat lightly on top of a desk with his arms crossed. He was wearing a watch, which Shiina had seen before, on one of his wrists that peeked from his dirty white coat.

Shiina quietly thrust his hand out, and Sasagawa turned around and then held out a paper bag.

"What's that?" Shiina asked.

"My leftover lunch," Sasagawa said, throwing the bag at him.

Shiina reflexively caught it. "What about the money from my wallet?" he asked, looking up.

Sasagawa stood up from the desk, and rummaged around in the pockets of his coat. "Dunno."

It was a stupid lie from someone who childishly held a grudge because Shiina wouldn't accept his money. Shiina made a sullen face as more time was wasted. Sasagawa lit a cigarette he had pulled out from his pocket. Shiina watched him without blinking. Every one of Sasagawa's actions seemed lewd and he was embarrassed. He couldn't take his eyes off him.

"Stop staring at me and sit down," said Sasagawa.

Shiina snapped back to reality and said, "I always eat on the roof. You can give it to me later or something, but if I don't have any money I can't go to work. So give me back the money you took from my wallet."

He put his hand on the doorknob. Suddenly Sasagawa hugged him tightly from behind.

"Here?" Shiina squeaked.

What was Sasagawa thinking? But Shiina couldn't say the second part out loud. He had no right to. Because he had been looking at Sasagawa suggestively, too. Sasagawa parted the hair on the back of Shiina's neck with his lips, kissing it softly. His lips traveled to his ear. Shiina gave a long sigh. He felt Sasagawa's warmth on his back. Once he decided to give into Sasagawa's touch, he knew there was no going back.

"Mmm..."

His body relaxed and he closed his eyes. Sasagawa's fingers crept in the gap between his cardigan and his shirt, and caressed him.

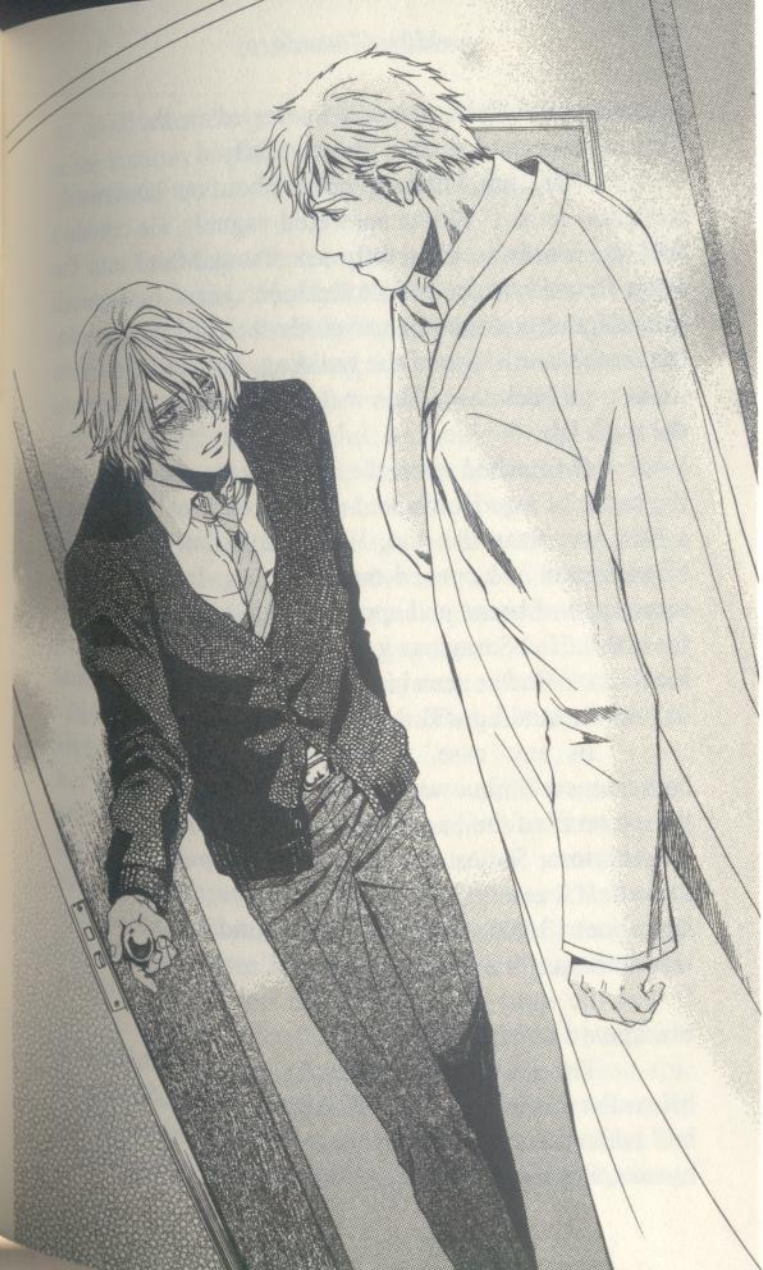
They had had sex until dawn so Shiina was overly sensitive. His member was tender to the touch, but Sasagawa's knuckles gently rubbed it until it got hard again.

"Shiina," Sasagawa whispered in a tender voice. Shiina began to breathe heavily. "Don't act so friendly to Nishida right in front of me..."

His lips touched an earlobe, and they felt hot. He still held Shiina from behind. Shiina turned his face to bury his forehead in the crook of Sasagawa's neck, arching his back. Sasagawa kissed him everywhere. They spent as much time there together as they could.

When there was about 10 minutes left of lunch, Sasagawa left the room to go eat. With his face still flushed and a dazed look on his face, Shiina pushed open the door of the math lab.

"Oh!" Nakahara dodged him, and then stared at Shiina's flushed face. "Shiina? I've never seen you



in here before." He seemed interested in the look on Shiina's face, and studied him carefully.

"Oh...um, I had a question about our homework, so I came here..." Shiina answered vaguely. He couldn't find the words to cheerfully ask about Mami and the baby. He said that he hadn't had lunch yet so he excused himself and continued on towards the roof. He usually ate on the south side of the building, but he didn't have time to go back now. This was just the closest place to the math lab.

He pushed open the door to the roof and saw the overcast sky. He walked on the concrete which was a little wet from the rain. He sat down at a place that looked good and opened the paper bag. Inside was the same type of bread and sports drink Shiina always had for lunch. Had Sasagawa gone out of his way to buy this for Shiina? Had he seen him holding the same things that day on the landing with Morishita, and remembered it?

In any case, it was clear that it was no coincidence. Shiina was a little impressed. He took out the contents of the bag. There was something left at the very bottom. Shiina got suspicious. He pulled that out as well. It was a folded up scrap of paper. Opening it, he saw about 13,000 yen inside. On the middle of the paper was written: "It's your money, so I'm giving it back." It was the same handwriting that he had seen on the blackboard in math class.

The remaining 10,000 yen that hadn't been in his wallet yesterday was probably the money Sasagawa had taken from him in exchange for exterminating the hyenas. Staring at his hands, Shiina suddenly smiled.

Under the gray sky, his ash-brown hair fluttered in the autumn breeze.

That day after work, he headed straight for Sasagawa's house. He walked through the city at night with the aid of the street lights and the bright lights that came from the houses along the way. He could hear the sounds of barking dogs from backyards. Before, when he would walk alone like this, he would always have his headphones on. It was partly because he had always liked music, but he had also needed the sound of someone else's voice to help him through the loneliness.

But it was different now. Instead of something he could buy with money, the actual sensation of someone holding his hands was more important. He didn't want to have to protect his heart anymore. He had someone who would hold him in his arms. That fact made him so happy.

As he was on his way to work, Sasagawa had called him, asking him what time he would be home. He might have called him again while he was at work. Filled with hope, he opened his cellphone. There were two missed calls. Smiling, he checked the missed call log. Looking over the names, he felt disappointment well up in his chest.

One was from a number he didn't recognize. The other was from Kanako, who he hadn't been able to get a hold of the other day. He had two voicemails, and listened to them with a sullen look on his face. The first was from his mother. She said they were home and

that she would let him in tomorrow. Apparently there was some reason why he couldn't come home today. Continuing, he played back Kanako's message. "Hello, it's me. I'm sorry I didn't answer your call the other day. Right now I'm alone at the hotel we always go to—Lakeside Hotel. I want to talk to you about something, so please contact me today. You can call my cellphone or the front desk." The message ended.

Shiina shut his cellphone and, as he walked forward, lost himself in thought. Kanako's voice was unusually gentle, but there was something impatient about it. Until now, he had usually been the one who called her, and if she didn't answer, he'd try again the next day. It was strange for her to have free time on a day like this. She wasn't the kind of woman who had enough free time to go to a hotel for no reason.

He entered a narrow alley. Withered vines twisted around the base of a telephone pole in front of him. It was just like how his passion for Kanako had withered. Shiina gazed at the unpleasant-looking vines, and opened his cellphone once more.

After ringing three times, Sasagawa answered.

"Hey, it's me. Something came up, and I might be a little late. Yeah. But I have to go back home tomorrow, so this will be our last night together. So I promise I'll come home to you," Shiina said firmly. If he had his way, he would go straight to the apartment. But he wanted to straighten things out with Kanako, or else it would be hanging over his head. He had been using Kanako for sex. It sounded cruel, but she didn't have anything to offer him anymore. He couldn't just be

her friend, and his sexual desire for her was completely gone.

So he had to straighten it out once and for all. It was the right thing to do, and Kanako deserved that much. After getting permission from Sasagawa, he contacted Kanako. He felt himself grow angry at her cheerful voice. He headed towards the hotel.

He got out of the taxi she had called for him, and passed through the elegant hotel entrance. When he wore regular clothes, the person at the front desk usually ignored him. But tonight the person's gaze felt almost painful. Shiina put on his usual cool expression and headed for the elevator. The door opened and a dark crimson carpet spread out before him. How many times had he seen this same scene with Kanako?

He walked past the mahogany doors that had gold numbers engraved on them. He finally stopped before one of them. It was Room 1305, the room Kanako was in. Ringing the buzzer, he heard quick footsteps from inside. He hated standing in the hallway alone, so he turned to the side. If the door opened and someone else saw him with Kanako, they would immediately guess their relationship. When he realized that, he got depressed.

"Jun-kun!"

The door in front of him opened. Kanako had an astonished look on her face as she saw Shiina standing out in the hall. He had predicted she might react this way. He clearly saw the displeased look on her face.

He knew why Kanako wore that expression. He was still wearing his school uniform. It made it more real that he wasn't just a high school student sleeping with an older woman, but that she was a mother with two kids who was sleeping with a 17-year-old boy.

He had always changed out of his uniform before meeting her. He had no doubt in his mind that in that moment she had looked at him as a mother would. However, this must have stirred up her desires even more, as she looked at him with moist, provocative eyes.

Shiina took off his glasses with one hand, and shook his hair out of the way. Kanako seemed mesmerized by his actions. He pushed her narrow shoulders and forced her inside. "Kanakano-san, I have something to talk to you about, too." He found it troublesome to even talk to her.

However, she didn't seem to notice his cold, disdainful gaze. She looked up and said in a childish voice, "Whaaat?"

She snuggled up against him, but he wanted to shake her off. He didn't even feel like forcing a smile. Instead he quickly said, "I'll tell you later. First tell me what you were talking about in your message."

Kanako's eyes widened and she smiled gently. Her red lips stiffened and she said, "Oh, that. It's really not that important." She pulled his arm closer to her, nuzzling him.

From this angle, he could see the top of her head. They were only one step into the room.

Shiina winced and quietly said, "Kanakano-san, I

can't today. That's not why I came here."

"Why not? Why does it matter why you came? Are you mad because I didn't call you back the other day?" She pulled at Shiina's belt with her hands. Her nails were painted bright red. She was clearly focused on only one thing.

"I'm not mad, but I can't."

Kanako clearly didn't want to hear it. She pushed away from him, and looked up with accusing eyes that seemed to demand, "Why not?"

Shiina looked down, and explained bluntly with his eyes half-closed, "Kanakano-san, I had sex all last night and this morning, too. I probably can't get hard again."

Kanako stared at him with amazement, and then her trembling lips forced a smile. "Hey, Jun-kun, who is she? Is she from your school? Or is she ...?" She was trying to act like an adult, but Shiina felt sorry for her as he watched her lips tremble.

He calmly interrupted her and said, "Anyway, I think I love them. So I can't..."

"No!" she cut him off in a low voice. Her willful personality was showing its true colors. This wasn't the face he was used to seeing, and Shiina was almost jealous that Kanako could abandon her self-respect and be this insistent.

"Even if you say no, it won't change my mind," he firmly declared, but Kanako still didn't look like she accepted this.

"I said, no! I care about you so much! How could you turn your back on me and be so cold? Did you just do it for the money?"

"I'm sorry," Shiina said, and decided to leave it at that, which silenced her.

Her black pumps stomped the flawless vanilla-colored carpeting. She was wearing a knee-length chiffon skirt, which revealed her long, slender legs. She always wore white or black undergarments with plenty of lace. How many times had she stretched out her arms and comforted him?

"I'm sorry, Kanako-san."

Her slender body reminded him of his mother. He would never turn to her again. He gazed at her face steadily. His lips moved cruelly and then said, "Goodbye."

Kanako's face looked mournful. She scrunched her face up, probably to hold back the tears. He thought it was strange that he felt so apathetic about doing this. He hadn't let this person inside his heart, so no matter what she said, it wasn't his problem. As he thought that, he suddenly realized something.

It was the same with his mother. She had pushed Shiina away, and wouldn't let him back in. She had locked him out as well.

He turned towards the door, causing his backpack to swing around. He hesitated at the doorknob.

Kanako chased after him. "Wait! I might be getting divorced!"

"What does that have to do with me?" he asked without turning around.

Kanako didn't react to the contempt in his voice. "My husband told me he had been working overtime, but he was actually having an affair. Of course, that

makes two of us, but there is just no way to repair our relationship."

Shiina snorted. "Don't tell me you want to take me in? You're joking, right?"

As he tried to distance himself from her, Kanako raised her voice in a frenzy. "That's not what I'm saying!"

"Then what?" he asked, annoyed. He turned to face her.

Kanako was silent for a while, and then she began to speak. "I'm just a little lonely. When I'm with you, I can forget about all the bad things. Since I'm having an affair, too, I thought I might be able to forgive my husband."

Shiina was silent.

"I'm sorry for being so selfish. If you want to break up, we can break up. But in exchange, I want you to stay with me tonight," Kanako said with a serious face.

She had been abandoned by her husband and was about to be dumped by her lover, too. Sympathy welled up inside Shiina. "But I can't today," he said, meeting her gaze. He couldn't stand seeing her pitiful face.

"You were with me because you were lonely, too, right? If you let it end like this, we'll both end up alone, licking our wounds. I can't take that anymore!" she said in a tearful voice.

He looked up at the ceiling, sighed and then embraced her thin body. "You're right. I was always alone, and was always so lonely. When I wanted

affection, I called you. I also called you when everything seemed to go wrong. You were the only one who could satisfy me, and I relied on having sex with you."

Kanako sniffled and quietly tilted her face down.

She might be my last woman, he thought as he held her close to him, and vowed never to touch her again. However, he had no regrets about letting her go. He patted her head gently, and Kanako nuzzled her cheek against him.

He had used her as a replacement for his mother. She had used him to run away from the obligations to her husband. They were both lonely, and weren't satisfied, so they had used each other. They had both needed each other.

After Kanako's cries had settled down, Shiina said, "I don't regret the time we had together. But you're not the one I want. I'll only sleep with that person," he swore both to himself and to Kanako.

"Do you...love them...that much?" she asked quietly. He felt sorry for her because that was the only thing she could ask.

"I don't have the confidence to tell them yet, but someday I will," he answered firmly. It seemed that Kanako had finally been convinced. Crying, she gave him a smile that told him she had given up.

"Shiina," Sasagawa called from the double-sized bed.

Shiina slipped into bed beside him, and the bed

creaked under the weight of two men. He looked around Sasagawa's room. The floor didn't have a thing on it. The white stucco walls, the black window frame, closet and chest of drawers gave the room a simple feel. It was just big enough for one person to live in. There were pictures of people Shiina didn't recognize stuck to the partition next to the bed. There were some violent-looking guys who were probably Sasagawa's delinquent friends from the past. There were some cute girls and there were also some beautiful girls who stared coldly back at the camera. Some had comments written on them. One said, "Tetsu-kun's girlfriend," in feminine script. One said, "Will you marry me?"

This morning he had looked at them before going to school, and had guessed that Sasagawa's first name was Tetsuya. This confirmed his suspicion. He also saw how many friends Sasagawa had. Even though he had said he didn't like groups, these pictures were proof that many people were pulled in by his personality.

"You look tired, so I'll give you a break tonight." The strong arm that pulled Shiina close smelled of the same soap he used. He closed his eyes and felt himself being wrapped up in a new feeling of comfort.

Sasagawa had said the only way to stop the loneliness he was feeling was to fill it up with the thing he was searching for. Shiina thought the thing he was searching for was the love from his mother and his family. He didn't think he could get that, but he didn't feel that familiar, lonely darkness right now. Sasagawa was holding his hand tightly. He was content enough to believe in him.

"Sensei."

It was a little later than he had hoped, but he could sleep beside Sasagawa until morning. Shiina desperately tried to fight off sleep, wanting to stay in this comfortable atmosphere.

"Hmm?" The voice from above him sounded happy and it made Shiina feel like he wasn't alone.

He buried his face in Sasagawa's warm chest like a child. "This feels good."

"Say that again when we're doing it," Sasagawa complained, laughingly, and Shiina smiled.

Sasagawa lifted up his hand and played with Shiina's thin hair with his fingertips. Even though they weren't naked, Shiina could still feel the warmth of Sasagawa's body against his. He had never been in love before, so he didn't know if it would be okay to tell Sasagawa that he loved him. But he knew for sure that Sasagawa was the most important person in his life. That was a huge step for him. Before Sasagawa had won Shiina's heart, Sasagawa had no idea how much anguish and conflict Shiina had gone through.

Right now he let himself be lost in the feelings of comfort instead of the passion of love-making. Shiina fell asleep thinking happy thoughts.

Sasagawa had told him he could stay as long as he wanted, and Shiina had thanked him but turned him down, leaving the apartment. Of course, he had wanted to stay, but if he didn't go home today, he felt that he would never go back there.

All the shirts Mami had washed for him were already dirty. He had borrowed a shirt from Nakahara, but it was at the cleaner's. He also needed to get some money from the bank. Thinking about all these things, he was overwhelmed by the time he reached the front door. He opened it without saying a word.

He could tell someone was there, and was relieved. He took off his sneakers and stepped inside, and his mother appeared from the living room at the sound of the door. Shiina was usually the first one to look away when their eyes met. Sometimes he looked at her with contempt. Sometimes he stifled what he wanted to say and ran away. Maybe it was because he was afraid of being hurt by what she might say. But only for today...

"Welcome home," he said, the words falling naturally from his lips.

His mother looked at him with a surprised look on her face. Perhaps he could act like this because he still felt Sasagawa's presence. Even if he couldn't see or hug him, their hearts were connected. Shiina was confident of that.

His mother avoided his gaze and returned to the living room, but he could tell by the look in her eyes that she was confused. Shiina stood alone in the entryway. He tilted his head and smiled at his mother's reaction. Then, he headed up to his room.

He had been too stand-offish up to this point. No matter how they treated him, they were still family. They weren't strangers. Therefore, Shiina finally realized that he didn't have to be nervous when talking to them. He

could say the same thing about his parents and Hayato. They were family, so they shouldn't treat him like this. They shared the same blood, so shouldn't that mean they should love him no matter what? Maybe they had no intention of compromising? If so, what should he do?

The answer was simple. He would try to be flexible and not take things so seriously. In other words, he needed to stop searching so hard and learn how to blow things off. He hadn't yet been able to act like that. He was afraid of losing his family completely. But everything would be okay now. He had someone who accepted him. He knew that for sure. He changed his shirt and gathered his things for school. After agonizing over it for a bit, he took off his glasses, which he had always used to help himself run away from reality. He closed his bedroom door and walked down the stairs. His face was bright, as if a demon had just been exorcised from him.

Right after lunch had started, Ai called out to him from the neighboring seat, "Shiina-kun, you look great in glasses, but you look even better without them. You look so cool!"

Shiina had felt her looking at him all through homeroom, so he figured she would say something to him. He sat down and faced Ai. A gentle smile naturally floated upon his face, and Ai seemed to be overwhelmed with emotion.

Before, when someone talked to him, he would try to evade them by keeping his answers short. But Ai

had always been so cheerful to him. Shiina had created a barricade to try to keep her and other classmates from talking to him. But Ai had overcome that and had always talked to him.

By trying to make himself invisible, he hadn't been able to experience the warmth and kindness of others. Once he knew that, he finally realized how arrogant he had been.

"This morning I accidentally stepped on them. But my eyes aren't bad enough to wear contacts, so I'm fine without them. I must look weird without them, huh?" He looked directly into her eyes as he spoke.

Ai shook her head nervously, her long, straight hair flying in all directions. Her actions were so desperately cute that he smiled, his eyes narrowing. If he had more time, he would've wanted to talk to her more, but first he wanted to satisfy his desires. Shiina stood up and excused himself from the room. He headed towards the north side of the school. After he made his way up to the third floor, he could see the door to the storeroom. Next to it was the math lab. Shiina slowly walked towards it. If Sasagawa wasn't there, he'd just eat lunch on the roof.

He casually opened the door and saw the large build of his teacher, who was wearing his white coat as usual. Sasagawa was sitting in a chair with his long legs stretched out in front of him. It looked like he had been grading papers. He set his red pen down on the desk and twisted himself around to face Shiina. "Where are your glasses?"

"They're broken," Shiina said simply. It was the

same lie he had told Ai.

"Did you break them?" Sasagawa pushed the chair back with his legs and stood up. The sound of his heels stepping on the floor drew closer to Shiina. Their eyes met and Sasagawa pulled him close. Everything about Sasagawa was so masculine it made Shiina's heart race.

That was why he didn't stop the arms that were stretched out to him. Sasagawa held him closely to his chest, which put him in a dreamy state of mind. Shiina sighed deeply, finally releasing the tenderness inside of him.

His eyelids grew heavy as if he had suddenly grown sleepy. They had been together until that morning, but these few hours apart had seemed strange. It wasn't enough to just press their bodies against each other. He wanted to embrace more deeply. He made a moaning sound, and Sasagawa relaxed his arms around him.

"What are you laughing at?" Sasagawa asked softly as he brought his chin closer to Shiina's ear.

"Nothing," Shiina replied.

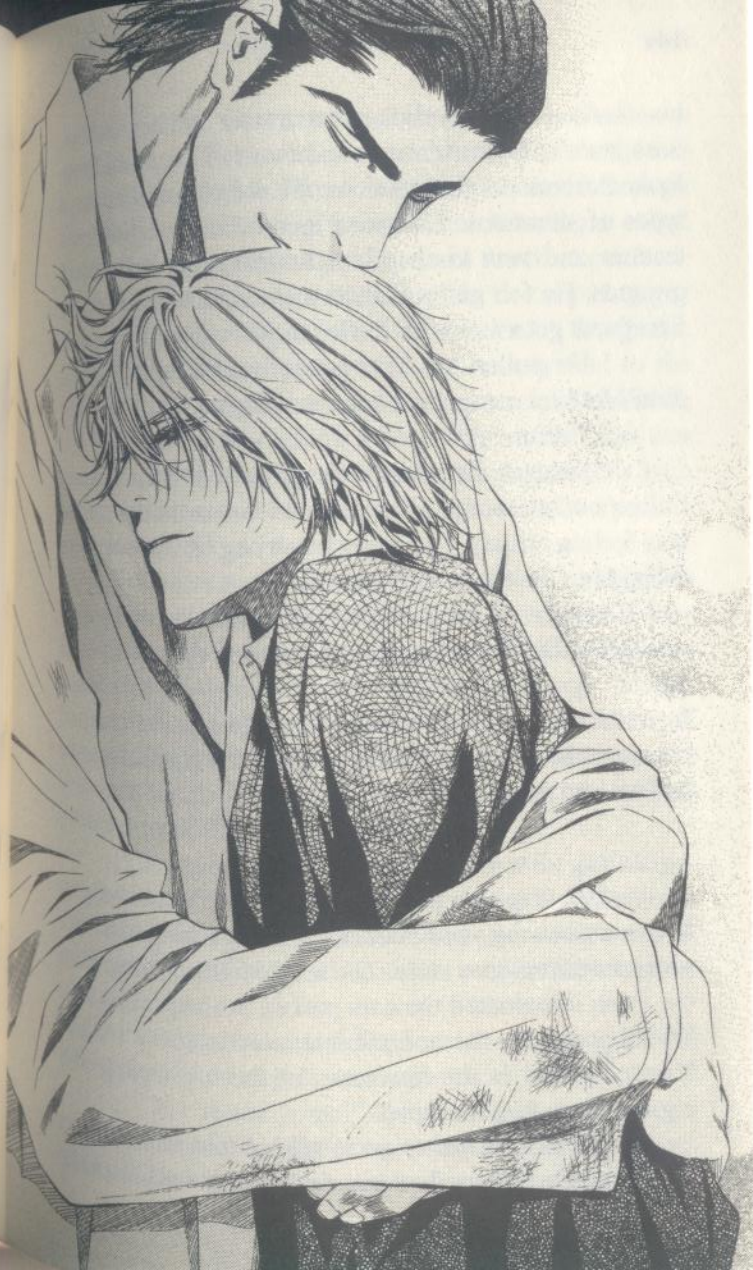
Even though Sasagawa could be violent, he was strangely kind. He was physically an adult, but something about him seemed childish. Shiina adored that unreasonable, strange unbalance.

"I won't hug you anymore!" Sasagawa threatened in a joking tone.

Shiina raised his face from Sasagawa's chest. He liked when they were silly like this.

"No!" he said bashfully.

Their eyes met. Soft kisses fell on his hairline,



his forehead, his eyelids, then finally on his cheeks. Sasagawa's lips were warm and moist. Shiina suddenly looked around in all directions. He wasn't good in these types of situations. Sasagawa ignored his position as a teacher and was kissing him nonchalantly on school grounds. He felt guilty that, as a student, he was letting Sasagawa get away with it. He couldn't stand it.

He pulled his chin away, but Sasagawa's lips didn't let him escape and kept pressing on his.

"Mmm..."

Sasagawa's kiss reverberated throughout Shiina's whole body, which relaxed him even though he was feeling uneasy. The paper lunch bag he was carrying dropped to the floor.

Both of them had gone there because they wanted to be alone together. Their lips devoured each others, spurning on their lust. Shiina grew excited from the sounds of their labored breathing. He clasped Sasagawa's back with both hands, and the grip Sasagawa had on him grew tighter.

He was able to bear with it until the next night. It was a Saturday, and after work, Shiina hurried to the nearest convenience store. The bright light coming from the store illuminated the cars parked in the parking lot. Walking towards the store, Shiina saw Sasagawa's white Nissan parked in the far corner of the lot, next to the cigarette vending machine.

Sasagawa had to go to school that afternoon to teach supplementary lessons, and Shiina had to work

in the evening. Sasagawa had come to pick Shiina up near where he worked so they could spend as much time together as possible. Breathless, Shiina passed through the heavy glass doors in front of him. A teenager called out, "Welcome..." in a flat voice from the front counter.

Shiina surveyed the store. He saw a young girl and a tall man having a lively conversation by the drinks. The girl's chestnut-brown hair was loosely tied to the side under one ear. She was wearing a school uniform, but didn't seem like a high school student. Her skirt was short and she wore black knee-socks just as the high school girls around here did, but she seemed too pure to be that old.

However, the man standing next to the unfamiliar girl was most definitely Sasagawa. He wondered if they knew each other somehow from school. Shiina looked at them suspiciously and took a step forward.

"You got my skirt dirty the other day!" the girl was whining. "I tried to wipe it off but it didn't come out, and Mama had to send it to the cleaner's! I was so embarrassed! She totally knows!"

Sasagawa put one hand on his hip at the girl's angry tone of voice. Today he was wearing a gray T-shirt under a red flannel shirt with distressed jeans. Only someone with such cool good looks could pull that outfit off. Shiina was a little jealous.

"Hey, that wasn't from me, it was yours," said Sasagawa. "Anyway, I was wearing a..."

"No, it *was* yours!" the girl interrupted.

They looked like a couple arguing. An uneasiness Shiina had never experienced before pressed inside him.

He went up and stood closer to them. Sensing someone's presence, Sasagawa turned and looked over the girl's shoulder. She also turned to see what he was looking at, and Sasagawa broke the conversation off to walk up to Shiina.

"Sorry, I'll see you later," he said to the girl.

"What? You're leaving already?" she said with a disappointed look on her face. She looked even more childish up close. She had to be in junior high. However, her bold black eyes seemed to hide a boy-crazy devilishness.

"Little kids should go home now," Sasagawa said, raising his voice as he turned around and put a hand on Shiina's shoulder.

"I don't want to! Even if I go home, no one will be there!" she said sharply, before turning away in a huff.

Sasagawa said he was going to buy some cigarettes, so Shiina accompanied him to the register. There was a man wearing a suit in front of them who seemed like he had bought the whole store. The teenager from before scanned the barcodes with an annoyed look on his face.

The gloomy feeling in Shiina's chest grew deeper and deeper as they waited in line. "Who was that?" he asked Sasagawa, who stood beside him. He wanted to know so badly he couldn't stand it. But he pretended to be casual about it.

Sasagawa didn't seem to notice. He took his wallet from his jeans pocket. He checked the inside of it and said plainly, "Oh, that kid? Her name is Mizuho.

Her parents are divorced, and her mom lives in my neighborhood. She's really lonely without her dad and her siblings, so sometimes she comes over to my place."

"Hmm...how old is she?" Shiina asked innocently.

"Fourteen, maybe? I think she said she was a second year junior high student."

The person in front of them gathered up all of his shopping bags and left the store.

"Uh, can you get me a carton of Mild Sevens?" Sasagawa requested at the counter.

The teenager manning it looked towards the direction Sasagawa pointed and said, "Okay, you want one carton?"

"Yeah."

"I'll go get it. I'll be right back."

They watched as the teenager walked back to the store room. The girl from before stepped forward. Shiina's armed stiffened instinctively. Mizuho touched Sasagawa's arm lightly and, after seeing Shiina watching her, gave a contented smile and left the store.

Shiina realized the flames of desire had started to burn again as soon as they reached the apartment. Sasagawa entered first and pushed the light switch on with his long fingers. He threw his keys down on the table. Shiina watched him silently from behind.

"What's wrong?" Sasagawa asked, turning around.

Shiina didn't have the courage to look him in the face. His skin felt flushed. His body was throbbing. He had never felt this much lust when he had had sex with Kanako. His head swam from the feeling of intense heat.

He probably wanted Sasagawa so badly because he had seen the way that girl had touched him. It was as if something unpleasant was trying to steal something he cherished right from under him. At any rate, the tight feeling in his chest was oppressive, and he couldn't take it. He couldn't deny that he felt somewhat jealous at the way she had acted.

But even Sasagawa wouldn't go after a junior high school kid, right? But thinking back to the time in the restaurant, the way the waitress and the other women looked at Sasagawa was exactly the same way Mizuho had looked at him. Shiina couldn't get the sight of her suggestive touch out of his head.

"Can I take a shower?" Shiina asked. He just wanted to be alone for a while. At the sound of his hoarse voice, Sasagawa looked up at him from his stretched out position on the sofa.

"Already?" Sasagawa raised the corners of his mouth teasingly as he gazed up at Shiina. He took a cigarette from his front pocket.

Shiina's face turned red. "Not that."

"Hmm?" Sasagawa asked in a low voice as he lit his cigarette.

It seemed Shiina had misunderstood the meaning behind, "Already?" It was an embarrassing misunderstanding. His face felt as if it was on fire. He

thought Sasagawa had been saying, "You already want me to have sex with you, so you want to take a shower?" But apparently that was not what he meant.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa held his large hand out to him, but Shiina looked away. The hand touched his cheek, and then grabbed the back of his neck. Sasagawa twirled Shiina's hair around a finger and whispered into his ears, "I like you better just like this, not freshly clean."

Shiina's whole body throbbed from the bittersweet sound of Sasagawa's voice. Sasagawa embraced him tightly and kissed him slowly. Shiina grew impatient from the long kisses. Sasagawa's eyes narrowed.

"Ah...ahhh..."

Sasagawa pulled his lips away and grabbed Shiina's T-shirt by the collar, pulling it up. He pushed against Shiina's hardness that poked out from beneath his shirt. Shiina couldn't stand it when Sasagawa handled it roughly. He tried to control the throbbing sensation that came from deep inside him. He moaned like a woman.

Sasagawa pulled Shiina's belt off and put his hands inside Shiina's underwear. From this movement, Shiina's jeans fell to his knees. Sasagawa teased his erection with the tip of a hot tongue. "Wow...you're even wet between your legs."

Shiina *felt* the wetness between his legs. His breathing became rough. He lifted his chin and let out a moan of pleasure with his eyes closed. Sasagawa wet his finger with Shiina's pre-cum and penetrated the place

Shiina loved the most.

"Nnnmm...ahhh...ohhh...ohhh!"

Sasagawa's finger moved erotically, and he kept pushing it in and pulling it out. His left hand was in Shiina's ass while his right hand made circles around Shiina's nipples. Shiina couldn't bear to stand. He buried his face on Sasagawa's chest, leaning against him.

"Stop...ahhh...ahh...I'm gonna come..."

Shiina cried out desperately, his hard dick pressed against Sasagawa's hips, quivering. Searching for a release, his grip on Sasagawa's shoulders tightened.

"Nmm...mmmm...ohhhhh..."

Sasagawa's fingers didn't stop for even a second, and he groped and caressed Shiina. Shiina ejaculated and his cum dripped down his jeans. With blurry eyes he looked up at Sasagawa. He kissed Sasagawa insatiably with a carnal passion. Sasagawa sat on the floor and pulled Shiina down to sit facing him. He had pulled his finger out and replaced it with something much larger.

"I love you, Shiina."

Sasagawa's voice was both erotic and serious.

Finally Sasagawa was inside Shiina. Shiina let out intermittent moans and tried to relax his insides so he could take Sasagawa in deeper.

"...uhhh...ahhh..."

Shiina couldn't hide the look of pain on his face. He pushed his face against Sasagawa's chest and tears came to the corners of his eyes. This was the first time Sasagawa had let him ride him like this. Sasagawa plunged himself inside all the way to the base

of his cock. But the pressure wasn't as painful as Shiina thought it would be. Sasagawa was going easy on him, as usual.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa kissed him comfortingly, and the shackles around Shiina's heart were released.

As his tense, hard member rammed into Shiina's sensitive spot, Sasagawa put his hands on Shiina's lower back. He supported Shiina's weight as Shiina reached behind him and put his hands on Sasagawa's calves, lifting his body up. Sasagawa's warm hands urged Shiina on. At first he trembled lightly, but then it grew more and more violent.

"Mmm...Sensei, Sensei!"

Shiina closed his eyes in ecstasy, intoxicated by the rough vibrations. They both panted. Shiina's cum dripped down, soaking them both. They made obscene noises as Sasagawa moved in and out of Shiina. Shiina thrust his body towards Sasagawa's in a smooth harmony.

"Wait...wait, Shiina," Sasagawa's voice called out desperately. His hands grabbed the back of Shiina's T-shirt, trying to restrain his violent quivering.

Shiina stared at his partner. He wanted to make him tremble more. He wanted Sasagawa to feel his own presence in his deepest of places. Both of them were surprised at Shiina's movements and his insatiable lust.

Chapter 7

"Shiina, do you have a minute?"

Nakahara called out to him one day after school with his usual serious face.

"Hmm?"

They slipped out of the noisy classroom and Shiina followed the clean, freshly starched white coat in front of him. That was probably Mami's doing. Nakahara brought him to the guidance counselor's office in the corner of the southern school building. It was decorated the same way the storeroom was. It was crammed, full of guidebooks on national colleges and vocational schools.

There was a long steel desk in the middle of the room surrounded by four chairs, but Nakahara passed by them and stood next to the window. It was still light outside and the clear autumn sky was visible. Shiina followed him inside the room and watched Nakahara from behind. Even though he and Sasagawa wore the same white coat, Nakahara didn't make Shiina's chest burn.

At such a simple distinction, Shiina was more than aware of his feelings of love. Even though they had the same coat, Sasagawa was not here. Even though that was an obvious fact, he still searched for Sasagawa's

figure. His hand felt lonely without the feeling of warmth in it.

Finally, Nakahara turned around. Shiina had been daydreaming about Sasagawa so he immediately snapped back to reality. Nakahara shifted his gaze from Shiina and hesitantly broke the ice.

"I've been thinking...maybe I should talk to your mother."

Shiina's eyes widened with surprise at this sudden topic. "What? Why? Again? Ahh, hasn't she thanked you yet for letting me stay with you?" What kind of person lacked the common sense to call her son's teacher to thank him? He turned his gaze to the floor with a regretful look on his face, rubbing the back of his head.

Nakahara spoke up cheerfully. "Oh, no. She called me. She also sent some sweets to the staff room."

"Oh, that's all? I'm sorry." She should have thanked him in person. He was embarrassed at a mother who didn't have common decency.

Nakahara's eyes wrinkled as he smiled and leaned against the window behind him. He was probably trying to calm Shiina down with his friendly gesture. "No, it's not about that. You said that you've been having trouble with your family, right? It looks like you're stuck. I've been thinking this whole time about what I can do to help. It might be meddling on my part, but I feel that your mother was different that day when I talked to her on the phone. Perhaps we can talk more calmly now?"

At those words, the darkness Shiina thought he

had forgotten suddenly resurfaced a little. But, maybe it was because Sasagawa had filled it, he no longer felt the sharp pain in the pit of his stomach. He was bewildered by this topic.

"But...I'm fine how I am," he said with downcast eyes.

Nakahara tried to cheer him up by brightly saying, "But you don't have to be! Sometimes mothers find it easier to talk to complete strangers."

It seemed Nakahara had already made up his mind to face his mother. The kind-hearted teacher was everything a teacher *should* be. His disposition made it impossible for him to ignore someone like Shiina.

Shiina kept his mouth shut, not knowing how to confront the situation. Would he have to expose the fact that he was the black sheep of the family in front of Nakahara, who he trusted so much? He was more upset about that than confronting his mother.

In the end, Nakahara had his way and Shiina found himself in his teacher's car on the way home.

Nakahara didn't burst out laughing at the fairy-tale-like house, but instead calmly rang the doorbell. When Shiina came home, he never did so, so his mother probably knew it was a visitor.

Just a minute, she called cheerfully from inside, and opened the front door.

Nakahara bowed. "Good afternoon. I'm sorry to come so suddenly. My name is Nakahara, Jun-kun's homeroom teacher at Futaba High School."

For a moment, Shiina's mother was rendered speechless at the sight of Shiina standing there with

Nakahara. "Ah...thank you so much for the other day. I'm Jun's mother." Her voice did a complete change, turning gloomy.

Shiina couldn't escape the uncomfortable atmosphere so he hung his head. The only thing in his field of vision was the red tiled floor. The only thing he could hear was Nakahara's voice saying, "Mrs. Shiina, I'd like to talk to you about Jun-kun. May I have a bit of your time?"

His mother sighed. The silence continued until she consented. "All right, that's fine. Please come inside."

"Thank you," Nakahara said, entering the house.

Shiina closed the door and took off his shoes, and then he headed straight for his room.

"Jun, you come, too," his mother commanded sternly as she stood in the doorway to the living room.

All Nakahara could do was stare at him. He had told Shiina earlier that it was okay if he talked to Shiina's mother alone, but after all, he couldn't go against Shiina's mother's wishes.

Shiina prepared himself. He turned forward and entered the living room.

"Please sit down," Shiina's mother invited.

"Thank you. I'm sorry to trouble you." Nakahara bowed as Shiina's mother gave him a small teacup she used for visitors. Shiina sat beside him, and she gave him the same kind of cup.

His mother sat across from them on the sofa. "Now, what is it you want to talk to me about, Sensei?"

Nakahara had barely tasted the tea when he began to speak. "Oh, yes. The other day, Jun-kun mentioned to me that things weren't going well at home. As his homeroom teacher, I was quite worried, so I thought I would talk to you about it. I'm sorry I didn't contact you earlier. I know it's rude of me to ask, but when did the problem with your family start?" He crossed his arms as he inquired, focusing his earnest eyes on Shiina's mother.

Would his mother be moved by his teacher's sincerity? She gazed at Nakahara for a while, and then looked down. "Around the time my younger son, Hayato, was 12, after his elementary school graduation ceremony, he confessed his feelings to a girl he liked on the way home."

"Yes?" Nakahara prompted.

"He's always worked hard at sports ever since he was little," Shiina's mother continued. "He was a confident child, and probably thought his first love would feel the same. However, she turned him down. Apparently she told him that he wasn't as good-looking as his brother. On top of that, she told him not to talk to her in junior high, and made fun of every part of his looks, one by one. He came home on the verge of tears."

"Ha?"

Hearing this, Shiina sniggered unintentionally. Hayato, who only knew how to despise others, got hurt that badly by someone? When Shiina imagined how Hayato must have looked when he came home crying to their mother, it seemed pitiful.

His mother glared at him with her usual stern expression, and then looked back at Nakahara. Her pulled-back hair made her seem even stricter. "Sensei, I'm sure you understand. As a parent, I shouldn't say this, but unlike Hayato, ever since Jun was a baby, everyone who saw him would say how beautiful he was and fuss over him. Being used to that environment, he said some cruel things to his brother that hurt him badly."

"You've ignored me because of *that*?" Shiina forgot Nakahara was there. He couldn't believe his ears at this ridiculous, simple reason. That had been the root of his darkness?

Shiina's mother glared at him. "What do you mean, 'because of *that*'? Hayato is a good boy. He's smart and good at sports. But people who don't know him don't recognize those things. When he's with Jun, he has no choice but to play the foil. Of course, I gave birth to both of them, but Hayato was being discriminated against, and I felt terrible for him. You have no idea how much Jun's words hurt him and made him feel inferior. So I decided that no matter what anyone else said, I would make him the number one priority at home. I did it so Hayato could make it through that sensitive time in his life and so he could regain his pride. And I did it so Jun would see the naïveté and the error of his ways," she said quietly, and then fell silent.

"So what happened?" Nakahara asked.

Shiina's mother sighed and looked like she was deep in thought. Shiina lamented the fact that she was so hot-headed and stubborn.

"Hayato developed a superiority complex and

began to look down on his brother," she finally admitted. "That's how much his pride returned. Even though I knew it was a warped way of doing things, I didn't stop. Just when I felt bad for Jun being ignored by his whole family, he started to be stubborn. And then I started to care less and less for him because of that."

Shiina knew it was harder for her to talk about her feelings than he could ever know. Her worn-out face told him that. She went on. "We ignored Jun just as we always did. But the day after we came back from our trip, he told me, 'Welcome home.' I couldn't say anything. Even though I had locked him out, he reacted completely opposite of how I had expected. After that, I thought some things through, and then I realized something. I realized that you can't just focus on the negative parts of your family. But I'm afraid to show Hayato how pathetic I've been, and I don't know how to be kind to Jun anymore. I'm really a terrible mother." Trying to hold back tears, she kept her eyes wide open. She bit her trembling lips. Her hands that rested on top of her knees didn't move one bit. Unlike fake tears, this was very persuasive. Shiina remained silent and breathed in deeply. He looked at Nakahara, who gave him a kind glance. Trying to give him some encouragement, Nakahara briefly squeezed his hand.

That warmth lasted only a second, and then Nakahara started to talk to Shiina's mother in a calm tone. "Mrs. Shiina, it might be presumptuous of me to say this since my child is only a baby, but please don't get mad. Please hear me out. I think it's very hard to raise children without playing favorites. It's one thing

if they're the opposite sex, but if they're the same sex they'll always be compared by those around them. Actually, I have an older brother, and there was a period when he didn't treat me kindly. And of course it was the other way around, sometimes, as well. There was a time when all I worried about was who our mother loved more. If you'd ask a woman, she'd probably tell you it was an Oedipus complex, but that wasn't it. Sometimes you just lose your fighting spirit and want someone to support you. A family should do that, no matter what. Basically, guys are actually sentimental."

At Nakahara's friendly tone of voice, Shiina's mother's stiff face relaxed. Shiina knew that this was Nakahara's roundabout way of referring to him.

"I understand your feelings, Mrs. Shiina," Nakahara continued. "But your younger son will soon be in high school, and then after that he'll be an adult. Of course, Jun-kun will be, too. There are many more obstacles for them to overcome. But you can't go on ahead of them and break those obstacles yourself. So don't you think you should reconsider your actions with the time you have left with them? After talking with us, I think you'll change your mind about Jun-kun. He's a kind-hearted person by nature. I'm sure he'll understand."

Nakahara met Shiina's eyes.

Shiina nodded. He turned forward and looked earnestly at his mother. "Yeah. I think I've been too insensitive. I never knew Hayato developed an inferiority complex because of me. I'm sorry, Mom, it's my fault. So it was an understandable punishment." He put his

hands on top of his knees, closed his eyes, and let out a sigh. He was able to apologize because he really meant it. He had built a wall because he was overly sensitive about being hurt, which made him reject other people's kindness. He had been so shameless.

"No, there's no reason for you to apologize, Jun," his mother said tearfully. She was trying as hard as she could to control her emotions.

It seemed as if all Shiina did lately was make girls cry. He lamented that. He looked to the side.

"I just don't know what to do," his mother said, patting the corners of her eyes.

Nakahara answered in a quiet voice, "Don't push yourself. Try not to forsake them. Help them when they need help. And if you ever get stuck, you can always come to me for advice."

"Thank you," Shiina's mother said. "My husband's always at work, so he's indifferent to things around here. He always just goes along with what I want."

Shiina felt terribly miserable as he watched his mother thank Nakahara.

The ill-will that he had towards her hadn't been entirely erased, but it was smaller. The warped feelings of attachment he felt for her were no longer there. The darkness he had always felt had cleared and all that remained was a gaping hole where it had been. But someday he could fill it in. With Sasagawa's help. Someday. Actually, at a time like this he wanted to see Sasagawa so badly. He wanted Sasagawa to see how pure he was becoming. He wanted to hold Sasagawa. He

was in his family's living room in spirit, but not in mind. He felt bad for being just as selfish as his mother said he was. He tried to tell himself to give up on suppressing the desire that welled up inside him. He drank the last of his green tea.

The next morning, his mother made him breakfast. He relayed this to Nakahara, who patted his head with a smile and said, "Good for you!"

A light, warm touch. Shiina wasn't used to it, and it made him want more. He thought Nakahara might have noticed. Excluding sex, he rarely had physical contact with anyone, and that's why even just a simple touch went to his heart.

They were talking outside the staff room, and Shiina saw Sasagawa walk towards them. After the next class, it would be time for lunch. Once they were alone, he wanted to tell Sasagawa what had happened yesterday. He wanted to be touched.

Resting on the hopes of this plan, Shiina waited for the sound of Sasagawa's footsteps to get closer. All he needed to worry about was where he was looking.

Sasagawa had such a wild feel about him. He carried his textbooks in his hand. He wore his dirty white coat.

The object of Shiina's affection was, right there. His impatient gaze finally rested on Sasagawa. At that moment, Shiina's heart jumped and beat wildly in his chest. However, his hot glance was returned by Sasagawa with a cold one. Shiina couldn't bear it. He

was astonished. Sasagawa went inside the staff room.

"What's wrong?" Nakahara asked.

Shiina shook his head and smiled, brushing the question aside. At any rate, he'd be able to see Sasagawa at lunch. However, when the time came, there was no one in the math lab.

"Did I do something to make him mad?" he asked himself. There was a rustic smell about the silent classroom. He stepped inside anyway. The sun filtered through the curtains, filling the small room with warm light. If only Sasagawa was there, everything would be normal. Disappointment welled up inside him. He had run up the stairs, so his breathing was rough. There was no point in him being so excited. He tried to endure his own stupidity. He pulled out the chair Sasagawa always sat in. He sat down and put one cheek on the desk. He felt as if he could smell Sasagawa. His arms fell loosely to his sides. His hair fell down around his face. He watched the door from between the strands of his thin hair.

The bell rang and finally someone opened the door. Sasagawa appeared. "Shiina, is that you?"

"Yeah," Shiina's voice was dark at the sound of Sasagawa's half-hearted voice.

Sasagawa pulled a chair back and said without making eye contact, "Class is gonna start." Just yesterday his eyes had been overflowing with love for Shiina, but today they wouldn't even look at him. He treated Shiina just like a normal teacher would.

"I'm going."

Discouraged, Shiina stood up and turned around. He couldn't bring himself to ask why Sasagawa

was being so cold to him today.

"Shiina," Sasagawa said as Shiina placed his hand on the doorknob. Shiina stubbornly didn't turn around. He felt himself being wrapped up from behind with Sasagawa's arms. "I'm sorry for being childish. I'm sorry," Sasagawa apologized, burying his face in Shiina's shoulder.

Shiina tried to look up to see his expression, but their faces were too close together. "Sensei?" His lips touched Sasagawa's cheek as he talked. Sasagawa held him tighter, and a slight moan escaped from his mouth. It felt as if his arms were going to break. They kept their faces close together for a while longer.

Then Sasagawa said, "When I see you together with a nice guy like Nakahara, it makes me really uneasy. You have such a pure personality, maybe you naturally drift towards Nakahara, but I just can't stand it." His arms tightened around Shiina again.

Shiina couldn't speak, thinking Sasagawa must love him more than he thought. His teacher just didn't like the way he and Nakahara had been so friendly. He was jealous, so he had ignored him.

"I made you do things when all you wanted to do was the right thing," Sasagawa said. "Isn't that a dirty tactic?"

The words Shiina heard were so pitiful he almost didn't believe they were coming out of Sasagawa's mouth.

"I love you, Shiina. I want you to be mine forever," Sasagawa added.

But Shiina couldn't echo his words. They

might both yearn for each other, but Sasagawa's love was clearly of a different degree. As he stared at the fingers that clutched at his cardigan, he tried to be as straightforward as he could. "Sensei. Yesterday I had a serious talk with my mother for the first time in a really long time. I think the day when my family can be normal again is really close. Even at a time like that, all I could think about was how I wanted to see you, how I wanted to talk to you. That's all I could think about, even when my mom was crying." He didn't know what to do next so he just drew his face closer to Sasagawa's.

Sasagawa smiled sadly and said, "Really?"

Shiina knew he couldn't yet give Sasagawa a look that conveyed as much love as his teacher had. The feeling of warmth inside Sasagawa's arms felt so natural, but it wasn't as if he didn't have some doubts accepting it. He was aware of that, but he pretended not to see. He bit his lips. He didn't know what else to do. The bell for fifth period rang, echoing throughout the small room. He was groping for a way to make Sasagawa happy, but he couldn't think of anything. It was because he didn't know how deep love could be.

He remembered that he had run out of his favorite hair gel, so he stopped by the drugstore near the cake shop. He had a little time to kill before his shift started. He listened to the headphones, which were no longer used for the purpose of helping him escape the darkness, as he passed through the automatic doors.

He wandered over to the hair care aisle and

picked up his gel. However, he lingered about the store. He no longer felt bitter when he saw mothers leading their children by the hands. That was probably because of how Nakahara had helped him. His homeroom teacher's motives were completely different from Sasagawa's.

Shiina had never thought of Sasagawa's shackles as a burden, though. Conversely, they made him happy. Sasagawa had seen all of him, and he was the only person Shiina had shown all of himself to.

But why didn't they have the same kind of gentle love that Nakahara and Mami shared?

They were of the same sex. Teacher and student. Their age difference was big. Their environments were completely different. There were many barriers for them to cross. He had ignored the fact that maybe that was why they were attracted to teach other. Truthfully, he was just irritated when he saw couples able to talk freely about their love. He was not jealous.

Were they missing something? Did they have too much of something? Was it from some kind of unbalance? Was their relationship just too new?

As Shiina thought about these things, he wandered around absentmindedly until he saw a familiar figure.

The girl wearing a school uniform turned around at the sound of footsteps behind her. "Hey."

It was Mizuho, the girl who had been so friendly to Sasagawa in the convenience store the other day.

"Evening." Shiina smiled ruefully and took his headphones off. Mizuho had been leaning over to look at various types of contraceptives. It wasn't rare for

someone her age to use them, but actually seeing her in front of those things made the scene very real.

"Hey, which one of these is better? I'm a girl, so I don't know." Mizuho showed no signs of being bashful as she held out two boxes of condoms. Her eyelashes were thick like a foreigner's and her unblinking eyes stared at him steadily.

Shiina felt silly that he was the one embarrassed. "Um, actually, I don't know, either."

The other customers were looking in their direction and Shiina had no choice but to step closer to Mizuho.

"Usually I get the ones from the convenience store, but I know if they don't fit right it hurts. Last time we totally forgot to buy them, so we had to use the ones from the hotel, and it turned all red and chafed. He kept saying, 'Ow, ow!' in the shower and I felt so bad for him," Mizuho said as she compared the two boxes with a serious look on her face, as if she was choosing cosmetics.

Shiina was so embarrassed to be in this situation that he buried his face in his elbow and hung his head. He couldn't understand how she could be so calm.

Mizuho continued, "But the large-sized ones don't have many in the box and they're really expensive. I'd blow my whole allowance on just one box!"

"So your boyfriend buys them for you?" Shiina managed to ask.

Mizuho nodded. Shiina's face had cooled down, so he raised it, but he decided to ignore the rest of her story.

"I'm glad he's okay with wearing them, though," said Mizuho. "The success rate is high, so I begged him to wear them. He said it was okay even if I wasn't a virgin, but finally Tetsu-kun said he'd wear them. But lately he won't play with me. So I thought I'd go over there tonight myself."

Hearing Mizuho's words, Shiina raised his face slowly. "Tetsu-kun? You mean Sasagawa-sensei?" The words coming out of his mouth seemed like someone else was saying them. He desperately tried to keep cool, but the color drained from his face. The sounds around him seemed to be coming from another world.

Where was he? He started to vaguely remember.

After Mizuho stared at him with her black eyes, she parted her glossy lips and said, "Yeah, why?"

He had no idea how he got to work, or even how he got home that night.

Around midnight, he was overwhelmed by a sense of vertigo so he raced to the toilet. He threw up, collapsing next to it. He didn't have anything left in his stomach, but the nausea kept welling up inside him. Tears came to his eyes. He roughly wiped the drool off his face. He was covered in a cold sweat.

Once that spell of nausea passed, he tried to stand up, but then the next wave came so he didn't leave the toilet. Trying to calm himself, he took a deep breath but threw up again. This happened again and again until finally he felt a little better.

Mizuho's black eyes were burned deeper into his memory than Sasagawa's.

He loved Sasagawa. He wanted to be with him. He wanted to make love to him. These were natural feelings for someone in love to have.

But maybe Sasagawa had been searching for something much more intense than what Shiina could give, probably a passion that would make him shun others. Mizuho already had this, but Shiina didn't possess that kind of passion. When he realized that, he became frightened of Mizuho.

The next day, his mother told Shiina it would be best if he ate something easy on his stomach, so she made him rice gruel for lunch. He drank a drink with electrolytes with his meal. He then slowly headed towards the stairs from the southern roof top. If he kept walking at this pace, the bell would ring soon. He opened the door. What kind of face would Sasagawa greet him with? Would he hold him with those same arms that had held a girl that night before? Smiling at his martyrdom, he walked down the northern stairs. He had been so stressed out by the thought of Sasagawa betraying him that he was sick all night. It was no wonder he felt bitter.

Before, when he would put his hand on the doorknob his heart raced, but he didn't feel like that today. Impassively he opened the door to the math lab and saw that Sasagawa had dozed off in his chair. He was hunched over with his head on his arms. Shiina closed

the door quietly and watched Sasagawa's sleeping face. His features were sharp, his face shapely. Shiina figured there would be no end to the women who tried to seduce Sasagawa.

Even if Sasagawa had told Shiina he loved him, was Shiina just supposed to forgive Sasagawa for cheating on him and sleeping with someone else? He didn't have that kind of benevolence.

Shiina continued to stare at Sasagawa with a sad look on his face. If he could, he wanted Sasagawa to hold him and sleep with him. He wanted to remove all the burdens between them and wanted them to hold each other, reaping the fruit of their love. He was stricken with a desire that couldn't be realized. He looked down and turned his face away. Perhaps hearing his sigh, Sasagawa slowly woke up. Even though he knew Sasagawa was looking at him, Shiina couldn't meet his gaze.

"I guess you're pretty tired," Shiina said with a faint smile.

"Yeah, I couldn't sleep last night because I was thinking of you." Sasagawa seemed serious. He stood up from the chair and reached his hand out to Shiina's face. His fingertips played with Shiina's hair softly. It was a gentle action. That made the thought of his betrayal even more painful.

"Yeah, right. You're really tired because you did it with a junior high student who showed up at your place with condoms," Shiina said softly, bracing himself.

Sasagawa didn't look fazed. His expression seemed normal. "Did you run into Mizuho?" he asked, smiling.

Shiina couldn't believe Sasagawa would smile at a time like this. He raised his face and glared. "What kind of a teacher are you? What is wrong with you that you'd lay a hand on a junior high kid?"

But Sasagawa didn't seem agitated. He didn't flinch. He didn't apologize. Instead, he made a face and said, "What do you mean? It's not a big deal. Some junior high girls nowadays secretly work at bars, you know. They know that the customers might do something to them, and there are even some guys who offer them money for sex. The world isn't as naïve as you think," he scoffed, as though Shiina was a clueless child.

Shiina didn't know whether or not he was too sensible or Sasagawa was too insensible. He could not comprehend this.

"Why don't you do it with someone else?" Shiina said with anguish. If their eyes met, Sasagawa would see right through him. He was scared of that so he looked away. "She's only 14. She's too young to have men play games with her. Also..."

"Normal women don't satisfy me," Sasagawa coldly interrupted.

Shiina had been about to say, "Just don't do it with Mizuho." He caught his breath and his eyes narrowed.

Sasagawa continued. "Even if I don't want them, they come on to me. I get tired of being with them. Even if it's a little strange, they're all the same to me. There's no value in doing it with someone unless they can touch my heart."

Value? What did that mean? Shiina looked

up. Sasagawa's arrogant attitude was apparent in his words. He had chosen Shiina because Shiina had seemed lonely. He didn't have anyone to confide in. He probably seemed like an easy target. He had fulfilled Sasagawa's requirements. He had fallen right into this trap. Sasagawa told him before that he wanted to save him. How outrageous. He just wanted to corner him into a place even darker than before.

Shiina scrunched his face up and closed his eyes, regretting everything he had done. Then, he opened his eyes, which were now filled with anger and contempt.

"I've had it. I don't care anymore," he snapped. "Go play with her, then." His voice dripped with forced indifference.

"Her? You mean Mizuho? Or some other girl?" Sasagawa raised his chin and looked down at Shiina as he spoke. "Are you stupid? I'll sleep with whoever I want."

No matter how much Shiina loved someone, he couldn't put up with this kind of behavior. "I can't put up with you!" he said, exhausted. He had been forced into Sasagawa's own pace. He never would have imagined that sharing his true self would end up being this miserable. He looked down and sighed, combing his hair upwards.

Sasagawa was standing before him with his arms crossed.

The bell rang, echoing through the corridor. He would never come here again, Shiina silently swore to himself as he turned on his heel. Just as he was about to go out the door, Sasagawa's voice called, "Wait!" and a



hand grabbed his arm.

Shiina shook it off cruelly.

"Don't touch me!" His angry voice reverberated throughout the small room. The place Sasagawa touched burned, bringing him back to reality, which frightened him.

His body had rejected Sasagawa.

It's over, he thought.

"You'll get me dirty, too!" Shiina's strained voice said. He was so close to tears. Sasagawa didn't try to stop him this time. Shiina felt his piercing gaze on him. He found even that hard to forgive, and he kicked Sasagawa's thigh. Sasagawa caught his leg and backed away.

"I never should have trusted you!" The anger towards the person who had betrayed him. Regret towards himself. His words contained all of those feelings. He furiously left the room.

Chapter 8

Shiina purposefully looked away. Sasagawa was staring at him. When he had turned around from the chalkboard, their eyes almost met, but Shiina avoided it. Before, he would usually be impatient or excited when Sasagawa looked at him. But since that day, having Sasagawa look at him had become dull and uninteresting.

"Harada-san, how do you solve the next problem?" Sasagawa asked with his usual arrogant expression. The boy that had been called on looked annoyed but answered him.

From beside Shiina, Ai covered her mouth with her text book and whispered, "He hasn't called on you lately."

When Sasagawa had been after Shiina's body, he had called on him a lot. Had Ai noticed this?

Resting his chin on his hands, Shiina grinned.

"Yeah, but even if he did call on me, I'd still ask you for the answers. I'm so bad at math."

"Hey!" Ai said jokingly, obviously happy at Shiina's gentle tone of voice. Ever since he had taken off his glasses he had started to be more comfortable talking to the girls in class. Except for Morishita—things were

still awkward between them.

Shiina sensed that Sasagawa was still looking at him. If he didn't like Shiina getting emotionally attached to someone else so much, why didn't he just move on?

After he was done talking to Ai, Shiina looked down again. He copied down the problem from his textbook, and looked at the board to confirm the answer Harada had given. Since he hadn't been paying attention, he couldn't see where the answer was written so he scanned the board. After copying down the answer, he looked up again and was caught off guard.

Sasagawa stared at him from the front of the room. His face was grim, but his eyes were burning with passion. His gaze seemed to say, "I want you so badly, I can't stand it."

Shiina gulped, and covered his face with his hands. He squeezed his eyes shut. His heart pounded violently. He was shaking because there was uncertainty in his heart. If he didn't care about getting hurt again, he should just forgive Sasagawa's immorality and return to his dirty arms. If he couldn't do that, they'd just grow farther and farther apart. It hadn't yet sunk into his brain that the lingering feelings he had were dangerous. His hand trembled. He couldn't bear the sensation of Sasagawa's eyes on him. The man was just trying to confuse him again. Sasagawa's motives hadn't changed. That was why Shiina couldn't make the same mistake twice. He felt numb until the bell that signaled the end of class rang.

Outside, the yellow Gingko leaves danced in the wind. It was only four in the afternoon, but it was already getting dark. Among the students on their way home, Shiina walked alone, feeling like his back would break under the pressure of his book bag. He felt a friendly tap on his shoulder.

"You look depressed. Did something happen at home?"

Turning around, he saw Nakahara standing there. His teacher was gazing at him with a worried look on his face, his expression gentle—completely different from Sasagawa's.

Shiina smiled and said in a gentle voice, "No. Thanks to you, I'm able to talk to my mother now, and I'm slowly beginning to open up to my family. Nothing else happened."

Nakahara's face grew stern, and he put one hand on his hip and said, "If you're worried about something other than your family, you can talk to me about it. You're the type of person who bottles up his emotions, so I worry about you."

Shiina felt like he had heard this somewhere before. "Do I really seem that weak?" he asked. He had always tried to preserve that cool exterior, but now it just seemed ridiculous.

Nakahara was quiet for a while. He scratched his neck sheepishly. "Actually, that's what Sasagawa told me. You might think he doesn't like you or the other students, but he really watches you guys. He's really insightful. I asked his advice about the thing with your mother and he really helped me out. He's amazing.

He'd only talked to your mother two or three times, yet he totally understood her personality. Probably because, unlike me who has led a pretty serious life, he's experienced all sorts of things."

"Huh?" Shiina said quietly. The look of admiration towards Sasagawa on Nakahara's face was restricting. If Nakahara had done something similar for any other student, Shiina probably would have believed him. But Nakahara didn't give him any other examples. Shiina felt as if he couldn't escape Sasagawa's tenacity when he heard that the man had been interfering with his home life behind the scenes.

Did Sasagawa really love him that much? A heavy feeling of entrapment pressed down upon Shiina and he found it hard to breathe.

He couldn't forgive Sasagawa for sleeping with someone else. But maybe there was something fundamentally wrong with his teacher. Sasagawa loved women and his good looks certainly didn't hurt that. It was understandable that he engaged in such indecent behavior.

Shiina had a moping look on his face. Nakahara said gleefully, "Hey, maybe doing this will cheer you up."

Looking down at the printed matter Nakahara thrust towards him, Shiina asked, "What is that?"

"Worksheets for my first year students," Nakahara replied. "I have four classes, so I'll need about 120, no, 130 copies. Can you go to the office and make some for me? Please? I have something I need to do right now."

"What?" Shiina inquired.

"Call Mami-chan," Nakahara said, smiling widely.

Nakahara knew that Mami was Shiina's weakness. "It's too much trouble. I'll pass." He tried to hand the papers back.

But Nakahara quickly shoved both hands into his pockets in order to avoid him. "You still have some time before work, right? It'll only take about 10 minutes."

Shiina found himself with this odd job as he watched Nakahara's white coat walk away quickly. Even if his teachers wore the same thing, he didn't feel the same bittersweet feeling as he did seeing Sasagawa.

Sighing, he went into the hallway towards the office, with the papers in hand. The window in the office was halfway open and a pleasant breeze blew inside. Unlike the math lab where he had met with Sasagawa, the white curtains in the office were opened wide, allowing the western sun to shine in. All the office workers usually went to the staff room after school, so no one else was there with him. Shiina stood leisurely beside the copy machine. He crossed his arms, took out his i-Pod from his pocket and turned it on. He put his headphones on and lost himself in the music that flowed from it.

He had never really liked popular music. He felt that those people only got popular because of their looks. He wanted something more real. Inside his head, the "real" world he had made up came to life. The one he had relied on so much to help him run away from the darkness. Remembering those times, he sighed. It was

just a world he had created for his own convenience. He had the same feeling of relief when he was in Sasagawa's arms. When Sasagawa held his hands, it helped fill in the loneliness. The warmth Sasagawa brought him taught Shiina the meaning of ecstasy. And just like a fleeting dream, it had disappeared.

"Huh?" He blinked back tears that threatened to flow and lifted up his jaw. But it was no use. The tears filled up his closed eyelids. He didn't know what he wanted anymore. He didn't know if yielding to Sasagawa meant he'd be corrupted or saved. He couldn't ask Nakahara's advice on this subject.

Suddenly the atmosphere in the room changed. When he turned towards the dim entrance, he saw Sasagawa standing there, staring directly at him.

It was futile to wipe away the tears that were because of this man. Shiina bit his lips lightly and quickly turned his face away.

Sasagawa slowly walked into the room. He stood next to Shiina and pulled off his headphones. Shiina glared at him for doing something so arrogant, but a more painful gaze looked back at him. He realized it was because Sasagawa saw the tears that dripped down his cheeks. He lifted his face up.

"Shiina. Aren't I good enough for you?" Sasagawa's voice sounded depressed, as if he was truly sorry for the other day, and for making him cry.

"Why are you asking this now?" Shiina wiped his tears on the sleeve of his cardigan.

Sasagawa's brows furrowed as he looked down at him. "I ended things with Mizuho," he confessed. "I

swear from the depths of my soul that I will never sleep with anyone else but you, ever again. I promise."

Perhaps it was because he was trying to keep new tears from flowing, but Shiina's lips began trembling. Sasagawa had already seen that his face was wet with tears. He lifted up his elbow and hid his face in his arm and tried to push Sasagawa away with the other hand. He wanted to push him out of the room.

"Shiina," Sasagawa said in an impatient voice. He pulled Shiina close to him, making Shiina unable to move. But this wasn't the math lab. Anyone could walk in on them at anytime.

"Let go...of me!" Shiina cried out.

"I told you, I won't sleep with anyone else but you!" Sasagawa held his struggling body powerfully.

Shiina glared up at him and yelled, "There's no way I'd believe a promise that came out of your mouth!"

"If you could believe me, will you forgive me?" Sasagawa asked.

His angry tone of voice added more pressure to Shiina's chest. Sasagawa's straightforward gaze silenced him. His scowl gradually disappeared.

When did he become so fragile? A stabbing pain seized his throat and all of his tears spilled down at once. He felt a warm sensation on his tight lips.

A nostalgic feeling swept over Shiina. Even though he had been filled with contempt after what Sasagawa had done to him, he didn't feel anything unpleasant about being held in this man's arms. Just then, he realized that the thing he had cherished had

finally come back to him, and he was intoxicated by the bittersweet feeling.

Shiina finally returned the kiss and his arms relaxed, dropping to his sides. Even though anyone could walk in on them, Sasagawa continued, seeming not to care. Shiina let out a short sigh and pulled his lips away. He turned his face away to hide the passion in his eyes.

"Shiina."

Sasagawa held him tightly once more, lifting him slightly off the ground.

"I love you."

Shiina's ears burned hotly from the closeness of his lips. His desire to shake Sasagawa's tight grip off of him slowly disappeared. He felt as if his heart had just awakened. He ignored the rational voice inside his head that was cautioning him to let go.

"I love you," Sasagawa's hoarse voice repeated.

Just as things were getting heated, footsteps stopped outside the door.

"Sasagawa? What are you doing?" Nakahara called.

An uncomfortable silence came into the room. Shiina hid his face with one hand. Sasagawa let go of him with a cool look on his face. He turned towards Nakahara.

"Don't interrupt me!" he said in a serious, but irritated voice.

Nakahara didn't notice. He must've thought Sasagawa had tried to hug Shiina as a joke. He said with a laugh, "Hey, now, don't make a pass at Shiina! Unlike

you, he's sensitive." He patted Shiina's shoulder making Shiina jumped. He looked up at Sasagawa cheerfully.

Sasagawa's cold expression hid seething anger inside. "I'm not," his low, jealous voice growled.

Shiina was frightened at the sound of his voice.

"Are you sure? Oh, hey! You did a great job, Shiina. Thanks a lot!" Nakahara cheerfully took out the copies from the machine.

Everything was fine so far. As long as Sasagawa left, it would be like nothing had happened. Shiina's face stiffened as he felt Nakahara cheerfully patting his head. The smiling teacher stood in front of him. Shiina immediately felt a sense of danger erupt in the room.

"Oh, that's right. I have made a pass at him. Many times," Sasagawa said nonchalantly, shoving his hands in the pockets of his filthy coat.

"What?" Nakahara gasped.

"Nakahara-sensei, I have to go now..."

Shiina started for the entrance.

But Sasagawa grabbed him by the arm to stop him. He pulled him close to his chest and rubbed his hands all over him right in front of Nakahara. "You know, sex. I've been having sex with your student."

Nakahara froze at the sharp sound in Sasagawa's voice. He couldn't understand what Sasagawa meant at first, and only stood there with his eyes wide open.

"I fucked him, and pounded into him again and again on my bed, and he shouted 'That feels so good!'" Sasagawa smiled ferociously. He buried his face in the crook of Shiina's neck.

Shiina couldn't speak—reality had been

thrust upon him.

"...What are you talking about?" Nakahara said in a vacant, dry voice that made Shiina freeze.

"And after he comes, he loves it when I pound into him with a piston-like action. He looks up at me with erotic eyes and cries, 'Sensei, Sensei!' over and over again. Right, Shiina?" Sasagawa's unapologetic words were the truth.

But Shiina, still held against Sasagawa's chest, shook his head awkwardly.

"The first time, we did it in the bathroom at a train station," Sasagawa continued. "But the second time was really good. It was the first day at my house after he stayed with you. We fucked until morning. I came inside him and then he came right in the middle of it. Then I filled him up again. We did it so many times he was exhausted."

Nakahara was quiet for a while, and he then gazed at Shiina. "Did you really do that with Sasagawa?" His eyes were accusing and stared daggers at Shiina. His usual fastidiousness was replaced by disgust.

"N-no, I..." Shiina stuttered.

Nakahara's gaze was full of contempt and blame. It seemed like he was saying, "And I treated you like family!"

"I..." Shiina couldn't find the words. The color drained from his face.

Nakahara finally left the office with a dark look Shiina had never seen on his face before.

"I'm sorry," Sasagawa apologized. Shiina sat with his back against the wall. Sasagawa's face had no sign of regret. "But until you're mine, I have to destroy all your escape routes." So he had cleaned up the barriers.

As Shiina gazed at Sasagawa who crouched beside him, he was convinced of this man's cruelty. "Why should I trust you? Why did you do such a terrible thing to me?" he objected, looking at the floor.

The wind grew stronger, rattling the window frame. Sasagawa stood up and closed the window with a bang, which made the curtain stop swaying.

Sasagawa sighed and looked at Shiina.

"I just told him the truth. That just shows you what kind of man Nakahara really is."

Shiina glanced up and said, "Not everyone is as strong as you, Sensei." He was rebelliously standing up for Nakahara.

Sasagawa dropped a piercing gaze on him. But he also smiled sadly.

Shiina didn't understand the meaning behind that expression. He buried his face in his knees and argued, "...I open my legs for you, you make me completely yours, and I have nowhere to run, but what am I going to do when you get tired of me? How would I be able to survive?" No matter how much resentment he put in his voice, Sasagawa would never flinch. He already knew that, but he just couldn't stand it anymore.

"I won't get tired of you," Sasagawa said firmly. "I'll always love you, I promise."

Shiina blushed at the confident words. He raised

his voice saying, "There's no way you can! People's feelings change! Look at Nakahara-sensei! He had been so nice to me, but..."

"My feelings won't change," Sasagawa answered evenly, not taking his eyes off him. There was not a cloud of doubt in his eye.

The more Shiina tried to push away Sasagawa's feelings, the more he felt he was doing something wrong. But he didn't give up, and kept pushing. "You're lying! I can't trust you!"

"Even if you can't trust me, I'm sure of it," Sasagawa retorted. "I won't ever be able to love anyone but you. I'll love you for the rest of my life."

"That's not possible!"

The only ones who could say such unrealistic things were children to their first love. That's all Shiina could think of.

Sasagawa's eyes filled with compassion and he said in a patronizing voice, "You're only saying that because you know there's a chance *your* feelings will change. But I'm different. I'm different from you, and from everybody else."

Shiina couldn't think of anything to say so he bit his lips. Sasagawa had been in a lot of relationships, so his words carried weight. But if Shiina admitted this, it would be like deciding the love he had for Sasagawa was never-ending.

"You're all I've got, Shiina. And I'm all you've got."

The sharp glint in Sasagawa's eye made Shiina forget what he was going to say. Shiina looked at him

with a discouraged look on his face.

Sasagawa tousled his ash brown hair more gently than Nakahara had, and added, "So you better prepare yourself."

Chapter 9

"Nishida-san."

In the middle of the noisy classroom, Ai turned around to face Shiina, the attendance book in hand. The outline of her thin body stood out against the dim classroom. Her chestnut-brown hair that flowed past her shoulders was straight and pretty.

"Are you going to bring that back to the staff room? I'll take it. I'm going there anyway." Shiina gave his best lady-killer smile, and held out his hand. Ai was staring back at him, but his gaze was focused on the attendance book in her hands. He really didn't have a reason to go to the staff room. But if he had the attendance book, he had an excuse to go there.

Ai earnestly handed over the book. "Thanks! Even though Nakahara's our homeroom teacher, he always forgets stuff!" she said with an innocent smile.

Taking the book, Shiina returned her smile. He absentmindedly thought that Nakahara had once smiled at him in this same way, too.

The staff room door was usually left open, except in the winter. Shiina passed through it without hesitation and walked to the desk near the window in the back of the room. Nakahara was on the phone, immersed

in a conversation with his normal smile on his face. He didn't sense Shiina's presence.

"You forgot this," Shiina put the attendance book down gently on his desk.

Nakahara jumped and gave an awkward, forced smile. "Ah...thanks," he said, pulling the receiver away a little and thanking him without making eye contact. His profile looked serious. Ignoring Shiina, he returned to his phone conversation.

Homeroom, science class. When they passed by each other, Nakahara ignored Shiina. He couldn't even look him in the eyes. Shiina took a half step backwards and looked wearily at the chair next to him. There wasn't anyone there. He pulled the chair out and sat down. He waited for Nakahara to get off the phone, but Nakahara didn't hide his displeasure. He made a face that showed that Shiina was disturbing him, and continued talking on the phone, perhaps to Mami.

In other words, Shiina's presence was troublesome. Shiina put both elbows on Nakahara's desk and stared at his teacher sourly. Nakahara really had no reason to blame Shiina's attitude. It was a normal, expected reaction. The pleasure he got from having sex with another man couldn't be understood by a normal person. Nakahara had probably envisioned all the things Sasagawa had exposed about their relationship.

"Shiina," a low voice called out.

Shiina looked over his shoulder and saw Sasagawa. He was wearing his filthy coat as always. His eyes narrowed and he gave Shiina a dangerous look, probably because he saw Shiina waiting to talk to Nakahara.

Shiina chuckled and turned his gaze back to Nakahara. Sasagawa walked over to them. Nakahara had obviously decided to ignore him. He showed no signs of being close to the end of his phone conversation.

Shiina gave up and stood from the chair, exchanging glances with Sasagawa. Sasagawa had destroyed all of Shiina's escape routes and had urged Shiina to only rely on him. It was a childish, impudent trick. Because of that kind of personality, if Shiina declared his feelings in a place like this, Sasagawa was sure to understand him. To be loyal to his desire, he had to prove he wasn't lying to his heart. In a way, it was very innocent. Without averting his eyes, he would be honest about what he wanted. Even though it would be refreshing, he couldn't do it as bluntly as Sasagawa had to Nakahara.

"I want to go to your house, Sensei," Shiina said in a hushed voice.

Sasagawa wasn't the only one who reacted to Shiina's whisper. Nakahara's back stiffened. Keeping him in his peripheral vision, Shiina put all his emotions into his voice and said, "I want you to pound into me until I feel like I'm going to die."

Shiina was demanding sex in a straightforward way.

Sasagawa answered with a serious face, "Then I guess I won't be taking it out for while." There was no trace of his usual arrogant smile. There were many other teachers and students left in the staff room. It seemed as a teacher, Nakahara couldn't ignore this obscene exchange in front of him. Sasagawa ordered Shiina to

meet him in the parking lot in 10 minutes, and Shiina walked back to the classroom to get his things. As he was about to walk down the stairs, his arm was grabbed suddenly.

"Are you okay with being his prey?" Nakahara said, gasping. He had a look of anguish on his face. He was probably conflicted with being compassionate to a student and being disgusted by his acts.

"His prey?" Shiina echoed.

If he looked at it objectively, it might seem that way. At first, he had thought that way himself. But Sasagawa's attitude had been consistent. Sasagawa had told Shiina he would save him, that he wanted Shiina's body and soul, and he had desperately stretched out his arms to Shiina. "I don't think there's anyone who wants me more than him, so I'm okay with it." He'd betrayed Nakahara, who clearly wanted to fix his behavior. "I'll gladly let him eat me."

Nakahara shut his mouth at Shiina's declaration, with a look of distress on his face. He looked downward, and Shiina felt a pain inside his chest. He shook off Nakahara, who stood stock still, and continued down the dim stairs. Students who were heading home passed by Shiina, and when he looked back he saw that Nakahara was still standing in the same place. A student greeted him on the landing, and he returned their greeting cheerfully. That's how it should be. Nakahara should be with regular high school students, not someone like Shiina. He felt a little sad, but he looked away. He silently bid farewell to the warm-hearted Nakahara. He shook his head and inhaled. He prepared himself to take

Sasagawa's hand. He silently started forward.

As soon as they reached the apartment, Sasagawa swept him off his feet and laid him on the bed. Shiina started taking off his clothes.

"Hurry up...hurry, Shiina. I want to put it inside you," Sasagawa said, fumbling to take off his own shirt and pants. His eyes were filled with desire. Shiina returned his gaze.

They couldn't wait until night time. Naked, they embraced, indulging in each other's lips. The closed curtains were tinted with the color of the setting sun, and outside the window they could hear the sounds of children laughing.

"Mmm...ahh..."

Sasagawa took his lips away, and started caressing Shiina's nipples with his fingers. Shiina started to pant. His body arched backwards from the storm of kisses Sasagawa laid on his neck, collarbone and chest. His right hand was stretched out on the sheets, and he intertwined his fingers with Sasagawa's and squeezed tightly.

"Mmm...mmm..."

Sasagawa teased Shiina's nipples with the tip of his tongue until they were hard. With his right hand, he pinched them and then caressed Shiina's skin, slowly traveling down until he grasped Shiina's aroused member. Shiina gasped and closed his eyes, turning his head to the side. He trembled with pleasure.

Still holding his hand, Sasagawa sat up. He

fondled Shiina and squeezed out the nectar that had been building up inside. Shiina's wetness increased. Sasagawa caught it in his hand as he jacked him up and down, making a wet noise. Shiina put his legs up, arching his back, and his pre-cum traveled all the way to his ass.

"Oh, you want it in there?" Sasagawa asked with a masculine smile. He took his hand off Shiina's member and pushed a finger inside him.

Shiina's eyes were still closed. He was overcome with emotion and he started to sob.

"Ahh...ahhhh...oh, ohh!"

He dug his fingernails into Sasagawa's hand, raising his voice in passion. Sasagawa put his finger all the way in, which made Shiina throb inside. Finally Shiina raised his hips and the pleasure surged over him like a wave. When it hit him directly, he thought he would pass out. He tried to cling to something, which tightened his muscles down there.

"...Let me put my dick inside," Sasagawa said gently. He quickly took his finger out. In its place, he shoved in something much warmer and much larger.

"I love you, Shiina..."

His voice was passionate. He expanded inside Shiina. He forcefully thrust his cock upwards.

"Mmmm...aahhh...ohhh, ohhhh."

Shiina clenched his teeth, but he relaxed his legs to allow Sasagawa to get in as deep as he could. With tears in his eyes, he looked at Sasagawa as their bodies linked together. His breathing was rough.

Their eyes met, which destroyed Sasagawa's

even gaze. "Shiinaaaaa..." he let out in a pitiful-sounding voice.

He kissed Shiina and thrust his tongue inside his mouth. He kissed him so forcefully Shiina felt as if he would swallow him whole. Shiina looked at him through hazy eyes. Sasagawa's uncouth, reckless appearance was completely different from his usual over-confident attitude. Shiina knew no one else had ever seen Sasagawa like this. He looked at Sasagawa with love overflowing from his eyes, and Sasagawa turned his face away looking embarrassed.

"Ahhh, ah, Sen...sei!"

He was overjoyed at the sensation of Sasagawa's member thrusting roughly, as hard as it could, as deep as it could. He let go of his hand, and moaned obscenely as he clung to Sasagawa's large back.

The first time they had sex, Sasagawa had said he would save him. But now it was the opposite. If he didn't save Sasagawa, he would be ruined.

"Mmm, ahhh, ahhh, Shiinaaaaa!"

Sasagawa had sweat rolling off him. His black hair fell across his forehead in a captivating way. His body temperature was scorching, he was almost hyperventilating. Even the air around them seemed dirty.

"I'll never...leave you," Shiina swore, squeezing his eyes shut. He moaned from the kisses Sasagawa planted on his neck. The breathing against his ear was rough. The pounding motions changed to a faster speed.

"Shiina, I love you. Shiina...Shiina..."

Sasagawa's face twisted painfully, and he held

Shiina close to his chest. This was the passion he had for his student, who was nine years younger than him.

Sasagawa looked fragile, as if he would lose himself. He clung tightly to Shiina. Seeing him like this, Shiina loved him. He loved him so much he couldn't stand it. He finally belonged to Sasagawa, and he wouldn't trade Sasagawa for anything.

"Mmmm, Sen...sei!"

He was no longer able to control the scorching heat that had been building up in his abdomen. He climaxed, with his whole body and soul. His gasps turned to moans, and his chest rose and fell violently. Sasagawa wiped the sweat from Shiina's forehead with his hand. He gazed passionately at that gesture. Sasagawa's eyes saw only him.

"Let's...stay together forever."

Shiina nodded at Sasagawa's words, and he stole a passionate kiss from his teacher. His hips began to quake, and he raised his voice again. Sasagawa sat up straighter and grabbed Shiina's knees, driving his dick rougher, deeper inside Shiina.

"Ahhh, ahhh, ahh!"

Shiina shut his eyes.

"I'm gonna come! Aahhh, Shiina! Haaa, haaa, ahhh ahhh!"

Sasagawa's whole body tensed as he let out a masculine, erotic moan to his heart's content.

"Mmmm, ahhh...ahhh!"

Shiina felt a warm rushing liquid fill his insides.

Sasagawa let out a long gasp. He seemed



exhausted. He fell down, and Shiina caught his large body and pulled him close. They waited for their breathing to return to normal. He held Sasagawa in his arms, and showed him nothing but love. Spreading out before him, he saw darkness. The unending, spreading darkness of ecstasy.

He would never let go of this warmth.

Afterword

Hi everyone. This is Matsuda Miyu. How are you? Right now, I'm in the hospital taking prescription iron supplements every day. I've always been quite anemic. I inherited it from my father! (LOL)

Anyway, this time I wrote about the standard pairing of teacher and student. The theme is the same as the titles "Darkness," and "Compassion." Someone who is trying to save someone ends up being saved themselves. To Shiina, Sasagawa is his savior, and to Sasagawa, Shiina is his Virgin Mary.

Nakahara is...well, don't all guys who were brought up well act like him? (LOL) He was just a supporting role, so I don't feel too strongly about him, but he's a serious teacher so he understands what he can do to help others.

Jissohji-sensei did the illustrations. I'm sorry for putting you through so much trouble! At first, my editor asked if I had any illustrators in mind that I wanted to work with, and Jissohji-sensei was the very first person I thought of! I was surprised at the rough yet detailed quality of her illustrations, and I'm very thankful at how they turned out. Thanks so much. I love the way she drew Shiina's beautiful face. I also love the way she

drew Sasagawa doing this and that to him!

I'd also like to thank my editor. Thank you for always helping me. I'm sorry I kept pushing the manuscript out farther and farther! Thanks for listening to my willfulness. I'm getting great sleep every night.

Finally, I'd like to thank the readers. I wrote a refreshing happy ending this time, but how did you like it? I'd love to hear your opinions. I'm looking forward to when we meet again!

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